Citation inside

# EURIPIDES' *BAKCHAI*: A RECONSIDERATION IN THE LIGHT OF VASE-PAINTINGS [1]

JENNIFER R. MARCH

Much modern interpretation of Greek Tragedy uses an a-temporal, synchronic approach which judges the text autonomously, seeing it simply as a work of art which can be interpreted in many different ways and from many different viewpoints. Interpretations can be made from the differing points of view of psychoanalysis, structuralism, post-structuralism, semiotic theory, as well as from more traditionally minded standpoints.[2] Each writer will stress different aspects of the play under discussion. Some will reach widely divergent or even contradictory conclusions. Some will reach no definite conclusions at all, preferring the looseness of open-ended and indeterminate interpretation.[3] Since, however, any great work of the imagination has by its nature the power to go on generating readings, all of these must have a claim on our attention. So we read them all, each of us making our own decision as to which readings have more validity than others;[4] sometimes agreeing, sometimes disagreeing with what is written; even perhaps in some cases wondering if we and the writer have been reading the same play.[5]

[1] This article was written as part of my research work during the first year of a British Academy post-doctoral fellowship held at University College London: I should like to offer my thanks to both institutions. I should like to thank also a number of people who read a draft of this article and made helpful comments: Pat Easterling, Herwig Maehler, John Barron, Patrick Hunt, Bette Wilson. (They are not, of course, responsible for any of the views expressed.)

[2] See Charles Segal's *Interpreting Greek Tragedy: Myth, Poetry, Text* (Ithaca and London, 1986) for a useful collection of essays demonstrating how readings of Greek tragedies can be made from a variety of viewpoints. As Segal says in ch.12 ('Literature and Interpretation: Conventions, History and Universals', 359-75): 'As critics and teachers of literature, we swim in baffling currects and cross-currents of approaches, with their conflicting sources in ethics, epistemology, psychology, linguistics, political theory, anthropology, and so on. There is not one but several New Criticisms, to say nothing of the old New Criticism.' The book includes a chapter on the *Bakchai* (and the *Hippolytos*) discussed in the light of both psychoanalysis and structuralism: 'Pentheus and Hippolytus on the Couch and on the Grid', 268-93.

[3] But see Andrew Brown's cautionary comments on indefinite interpretation in his review of Simon Goldhill's *Reading Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge, 1986) in *JACT Review*, Second Series Number I (Summer 1987), 22.

[4] As Segal (n.2, 'Literature and Interpretation') comments (370): 'To recognize the plurality of possible readings is not to deny that some may be better than others.'

[5] See Kevin McCabe's sensible comments in 'Was Juvenal a Structuralist? A Look at Anachronism in Literary Criticism', *G&R* 33.1 (1986), 78-84; for instance (82), 'Much modern criticism ... does not so much try to illuminate the writer and his text as to completely reinterpret the text in line with contemporary principles'. See also Graham McCann's excellent article, 'The Critic as Human Being', in *THES*, 31.3.89, 11, from which I quote just one short extract: 'The New Criticism and its various descendents rescued texts, and continues to do so, from certain kinds of distortion and emasculation by insisting on their autonomy and examining them carefully and closely. However, by viewing them essentially as sets of internal relations or as objects in a network of other cultural objects, such criticism also dehumanizes them. When we withdraw a work from the context of author and audience, we help prepare for those current theoretical gymnastics in which all those artists, and all those stories, poems, plays, movies and music that have given us so much are "only" texts, better off demystified and deconstructed to make sure we will not be tricked into loving or learning from them. The critic must guard against intolerance and insensitivity as well as indulgence and infatuation; when we are too little attentive to each other's presence, each other's wonder, each other's human plight, we are unworthy of our subject.' On this particular

Yet this broad spectrum of interpretation emphasizes the fact that a great play can live forever, with each generation rereading and reinterpreting it, and every reader finding in it his own particular value and significance.[6] It must, moreover, be of immense help in any modern restaging of an ancient work, when the director can choose his own dramatic interpretation from a multitude of possibilities, and when an audience, including those without any knowledge of the Greek theatre or even of ancient Greece itself, can be made to respond to the play as a great and still relevant work of art.

To move to the play which is the subject of this article, let me quote Charles Segal on the *Bakchai*: 'A literary masterpiece like the *Bacchae* does not have one single definite meaning, but rather an endlessly shifting constellation of possibilities, multiple relations and interactions, fixities and indeterminacies that are constantly rearranging themselves with each reading and each reader.'[7] This rightly emphasizes the fact that this play (and indeed, by implication, any great play) must give rise to a plurality of readings. In this article, however, I shall be focussing on the *Bakchai* from a narrower viewpoint, using a historical rather than an a-temporal approach and considering the play within the context of its own time. Let me quote Segal again, this time on the importance of both the a-temporal and the historical approach to a work of art: 'Every work of art ... requires reinterpretation in the contemporary idiom and against the contemporary concerns of each generation. But each has also a meaning — or rather a complex of meanings — in its own time and place. I believe that it is both possible and necessary to determine those meanings as best we can, knowing full well that we can arrive at only an imperfect approximation.'[8]

There are, of course, many ways of interpreting a play within its original context, the time when it was first created and set before an Attic audience. We can take into account the staging of the play,[9] remembering that at the first performance the author himself was usually the *didaskalos*. We can take into account the social and political milieu in which the play took place, tracing as far as possible contemporary events and conditions. We can try to establish the original audience's attitudes, beliefs, preconceptions[10] — though this is clearly a mighty

topic, see also Kenneth J. Reckford in 'Concepts of Demoralization in the *Hecuba*', *Directions in Euripidean Criticism*, ed. P. Burian (Durham, 1985), 112-28: 'Are we so involved in constructing patterns to catch literary meanings that we fail to bring receptive minds and hearts to tragedy?' (112).

[6] As Segal (n.2, 'Literature and Interpretation') sums up (366): 'Every work of art exists both in its well defined historical context and also, in a sense, out of time, as an artifact that can speak to men and women across the boundaries of specific historical moments.'

[7] *Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides' Bacchae* (Princeton, 1982), 5. This book also includes (348-56) a very useful bibliography of work on the *Bakchai*. Other studies are included in the bibliography of Helene P. Foley's *Ritual Irony: Poetry and Sacrifice in Euripides* (Ithaca and London, 1985), 259-73.

[8] Segal (n.2, 'Literature and Interpretation'), 372. See also Richard Seaford in *JHS* 104 (1984), 203-4, where, in his review of Segal's *Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides' Bacchae* (see n.7 above), he speaks of the 'inevitable contemporaneity' of interpretation which is unbreakable even by Dionysos, but which can nevertheless be diminished 'if we include in the investigation the nature and ultimate origin of our methodological preconceptions'. On the way in which the historical approach can touch on the timeless, see B. M. W. Knox on Soph. *O. T.* (*Oedipus at Thebes* (London and New Haven, 1957), 2): 'The attempt to understand the play as a particular phenomenon reveals its universal nature; the rigidly historical method finds itself uncovering the timeless. The materials of which the *Oedipus Tyrannus* is constructed are basic to the human situation. They have not changed since the play was written and probably never will. The play needs only to be seen clearly as what it was, to be understood as what it is.'

[9] This is where Oliver Taplin's work, for instance, is so valuable: see esp. *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus* (Oxford, 1977) and *Greek Tragedy in Action* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1978). For an interesting discussion of the relative merits of Taplin's approach to tragedy and that of Simon Goldhill (see n.3 above), see David Wiles' 'Reading Greek Performance', *G&R* 34.2 (1987), 136-51.

[10] Here I should mention how valuable for this purpose work on ritual can be. Rather than give an extensive bibliography, I select two examples with particular reference to the *Bakchai*: Richard Seaford's 'Dionysiac Drama and the Dionysiac Mysteries', *CQ* 31.2 (1981), 252-75, and 'Pentheus' Vision: *Bacchae* 918-22', *CQ* 37.1 (1987),

task, and moreover different members of the audience would have reacted in different ways.[11] My own approach, however, will be to consider the *Bakchai* with reference to one specific aspect of its fifth century context, that of the author's selection and use of particular dramatic material. Greek tragedies deal with stories taken from the traditional body of myths which had been passed down the generations, very often in the form of poetry and often, too, in the form of dramatic poetry. But creative poets have always reshaped, recreated and reinterpreted these myths.[12] Thus the Greek tragic playwright, working within this developing tradition, adapts his material: he makes changes to the myths, and adds or subtracts elements for his own particular dramatic purposes. It is, I suggest, these innovations to what we might call the 'given' myth,[13] the places where he deliberately deviates from the more familiar version or versions and creates his own, which can help to reveal an author's unique tragic vision in any particular play.

This type of approach must by its nature be speculative, since, if we try to define these innovations, we have also to define the details of the myth before the play was written, and here our evidence is incomplete. Nevertheless we can look at all the evidence available — evidence from earlier literature, references in later authors, papyrus fragments, vase-paintings, even sculptures — to get as clear a picture as possible of the earlier myth, and then go on to draw tentative conclusions as to what an author's innovations seem to have been. If these conclusions, drawn from exterior evidence, seem to be reinforced by evidence from within the play itself, then the case is made stronger. Finally, always bearing in mind that these suggested innovations are speculative, and not established fact, we can go one step further and ask what they mean for an interpretation of the play itself. This is the method that we shall apply to the *Bakchai*.

* * * * *

In this play Dionysos has come in disguise to Thebes, his birthplace, to manifest himself as a god. He has driven the townswomen mad into the mountains, on to Kithairon, as maenads; and when their young king Pentheus persists in opposing him, Dionysos maddens him too and lures him on to Kithairon disguised as a maenad. Here Pentheus is torn to pieces by the women on the mountain, with his mother, Agaue, leading them: it is she who is the first to rend him. She then carries her son's head home in triumph, believing it to be that of a lion which she has killed in the hunt. Kadmos, her father, brings her back to reality, to recognize whose head she holds in her hands, and the final scene is full of their mutual grief as they mourn over Pentheus' broken body.

This is the powerful narrative which Euripides presents in his *Bakchai*. But (to sum up the arguments which I shall develop over the remainder of this article) it would seem from earlier iconographic and literary evidence that, before Euripides' play, Pentheus went armed into battle against the maenads and was torn to pieces while fighting them; nowhere in art or literature is there any trace of a divergence from this version of the legend. So two of Euripides' major innovations in the *Bakchai* would seem to have been the maddening of Pentheus by Dionysos,

76-8. And for a particularly fine example of how illuminating a discussion on the evocation of ritual can be, see also his 'The Last Bath of Agamemnon', *CQ* 34.2 (1984), 247-54.

[11] See Hans Oranje, *Euripides' Bacchae: The Play and its Audience* (Leiden, 1984), 20-33, for a general discussion of audience response.

[12] See my own book, *The Creative Poet*, *BICS* Suppl. 49 (London, 1987), in which I discuss poets' reshaping of five major myths: those of Oidipous, Klytaimestra and the *Oresteia*, Deianeira and the death of Herakles, Peleus and Achilles, and Meleagros.

[13] I do not mean to imply any idea of one monolithic form of the myth. Rather I use this phrase to cover all the versions that had been current in their various forms prior to dramatization in the play in question.

and his journey on to Kithairon in woman's dress.[14] This conclusion, as we shall see, is strongly reinforced by internal evidence from the text of the play itself. Furthermore it is possible that there is a third major innovation in this play: that Euripides was the first to have Pentheus killed by his own mother, Agaue.[15] We shall look in detail at the evidence behind these conclusions, and shall then move on to see what effect they have on a rereading of Euripides' play.

Let us begin with Pentheus, and the events which lead to his death at the maenads' hands.

Pentheus with the maenads, both before and after his violent death, was a popular subject with the vase painters. But always Pentheus is shown as armed and in male dress, never in the dress of a maenad as in the *Bakchai*. On a red-figure pyxis about contemporary with the *Bakchai* we see Pentheus setting out from his palace with net and hunting spears to hunt the maenads (Plates 1a and 1b).[16] An Italiote kalpis of a similar date shows an armed Pentheus hiding between two trees, presumably about to leap out and attack the maenads (Plates 1c and 1d).[17] Several illustrations from around the end of the fifth century show Pentheus in armed combat with the maenads: an Italiote cup shows a named Pentheus, armed with spear and sword, attacked by two maenads, one of whom has a sword (Plate 2a):[18] a red-figure fragment has again a named Pentheus, armed and fighting (Plate 2b):[19] another Italiote cup shows Pentheus armed with sword and two spears in combat with three maenads, one of whom fights with a sword, another with a thyrsos (Plate 2c).[20] The lid of a large red-figure pyxis of the second half of the fifth century shows Pentheus about to be torn apart: one maenad has him by the leg, another by an arm and a leg (Plate 2d).[21] Again, as in all the other illustrations, Pentheus is armed: his sword is at his side.

Thus on all of these pots we have scenes which are suggested as possible outcomes in the *Bakchai*: fighting (which promises to be the outcome of Pentheus' conflict with Dionysos right up to and including Pentheus' call for his arms at 809), hunting (Pentheus threatens to hunt the maenads at 228), and ambush (suggested at 722-3 in the speech of the First Messenger, which in its entirety is a foreshadowing of all the terrible events to come). But certainly in none of the vase-paintings is there any trace at all of the *actual* outcome of the *Bakchai*: of a Pentheus going to his death disguised as a maenad, and thus no hint of the madness which in Euripides is the essential pre-requisite of Pentheus' donning woman's dress.[22] Dodds acknowledges that

[14] E. R. Dodds, *Euripides: Bacchae* (Oxford, 1960), xxvii-xxviii and 181, sees this woman's dress (along with various other details of the *Bakchai*) as a traditional feature reflecting ritual. But, even if so, it does not follow that it was traditional to the story of Pentheus.

[15] T. B. L. Webster (*The Tragedies of Euripides* (London, 1967), 268-9) suggests on the evidence of vase-paintings that perhaps it was Euripides who first had Agaue kill Pentheus, but he does not develop the idea further. The Hypothesis to the *Bakchai* ascribed to Aristophanes of Byzantion says: ἡ μυθοποιια κεῖται παρ' Αἰσχύλῳ ἐν Πενθεῖ. But, as Webster comments (269): 'It would be rash to conclude more from this than that Aeschylus included the resistance and rending of Pentheus.'

[16] Heidelberg: Brommer (F. Brommer, *Vasenlisten zur Griechischen Heldensage*[3] (Marburg, 1973)) 485 B6; Philippart (H. Philippart, 'Iconographie des Bacchantes d'Euripide', *Rev. belge de phil. et d'hist.* ix (1930), 4-72) no. 132; see also Dodds (n.14), xxxiv.

[17] Munich 3267; Brommer 486 D8; Philippart no. 137.

[18] Naples H.2562; Brommer 486 D6; Philippart no. 138.

[19] Brommer 486 D7; Philippart no. 139.

[20] Ruvo, Jatta 1617; Brommer 486 D5; Philippart no. 133; see also Otto Jahn, *Pentheus und die Mainaden* (Kiel, 1841). Other examples of Pentheus in armed combat with the maenads which are not illustrated here are described in Philippart, nos. 134 and 140.

[21] Louvre G 445; Brommer 485 B5; Philippart no. 142.

[22] Louis Séchan (*Études sur la tragédie grecque dans ses rapports avec la céramique* (Paris, 1926), 102-6, 308-10) — and, following him, Philippart (n.16) — feels nevertheless that the later vases can still be said to have been

nowhere 'in Greek art is there any indication that Pentheus is disguised', though he goes on to say that 'this may be due merely to the difficulty of making a disguised Pentheus easily recognizable'.[23] This however is a poor argument, since a man in female Dionysiac dress could surely have been made fairly distinctive; and if he were painted in some familiar context, such as in hiding from the maenads (as we have already seen an armed Pentheus on the Munich kalpis, Plates 1c and 1d), then there would be no doubt as to his identity. Moreover Pentheus is not only painted in distinctly male dress but is also consistently shown armed, and this detail is totally incompatible with the Euripidean verson. We know that Xenokles produced a *Bakchai* which won first prize in 415, and it is tempting to connect all the later vases with this otherwise unknown play. This connection must of course remain uncertain. However we can most certainly say from the iconographic evidence that the vase-painters saw Pentheus as going in male attire and armed against the maenads before being torn to pieces by them.[24]

To turn to the literary evidence, this seems to have been the version of the legend which Aischylos also knew. He wrote a trilogy on Dionysos at Thebes, the plays being probably the *Semele*, the *Xantriai*, and finally the *Pentheus*.[25] Only one fragment is left of the *Pentheus*, of no help in telling how Pentheus died: it is simply an injunction against the shedding of blood (μηδ' αἵματος πέμφιγα πρὸς πέδῳ βάλῃς).[26] But Aischylos does refer to Pentheus' death in a later play, the *Eumenides* of 458 (25-6):

> ... ... Βάκχαις ἐστρατήγησεν θεός,
> λαγὼ δίκην Πενθεῖ καταρράψας μόρον.
>
> 'The god led out his army of Bakchai, contriving for Pentheus a fate like that of a hare.'

The god was at the head of his maenadic army, and Pentheus was torn to pieces by them, as a hare is by hounds, we must assume. Certainly the most natural image conjured up by these words is one of armed conflict, which would suggest that the version of the legend which Aischylos knew and used was the one familiar to the vase painters also.

Unfortunately this is all the literary evidence for the pre-Euripidean version of the legend that we possess, and it is decidedly scanty compared with the plentiful iconographic evidence. Nevertheless there is nothing to conflict with the story as we see it on the vases; and it seems reasonable to conclude that, as far as we can tell, the legend of Pentheus before the *Bakchai* seems to have been quite different from Euripides' version, and had Pentheus killed in open conflict against the maenads who were spurred on by Dionysos. Moreover this conclusion is reinforced by the text of the *Bakchai* itself, since for more than half the play Euripides seems to be making much dramatic capital out of encouraging his audience to expect just such an outcome.

In the Prologue, Dionysos outlines his plans (47-52):

influenced by Euripides' *Bakchai*, despite the fact that Pentheus is shown armed and in normal dress, because the vase painters are depicting scenes suggested by Pentheus' threats of fighting rather than by his actual death in woman's dress after falling from the pine. This, I feel, is unconvincing, since it is hard to believe that anyone who had experienced the emotional power of Euripides' play could even consider illustrating it in a manner so at variance with its actual content. It is far more satisfactory to see the vases as reflecting a different tradition altogether.

[23] Dodds (n.14), xxxiv-xxxv.

[24] So perhaps Ovid was drawing directly on the pre-Euripidean version of the legend for his account in *Met.* 3 of the military Pentheus going to his death on the mountain.

[25] For a discussion of these earlier Dionysiac plays, see Dodds (n.14), xxviii-xxxiii.

[26] Aisch. fr. 183. Although these words recall Eur. *Ba.* 837, it is going too far to assume, as Webster does (n.15, 275, drawing on Dodds (n.14), xxxi) that 'Aeschylus probably had a scene in which Dionysos lured Pentheus to spy on the maenads'.

ὧν οὕνεκ' αὐτῷ θεὸς γεγὼς ἐνδείξομαι
πᾶσίν τε Θηβαίοισιν. ἐς δ' ἄλλην χθόνα,
τἀνθένδε θέμενος εὖ, μεταστήσω πόδα,
δεικνὺς ἐμαυτόν· ἢν δὲ Θηβαίων πόλις
ὀργῇ σὺν ὅπλοις ἐξ ὄρους βάκχας ἄγειν
ζητῇ, ξυνάψω μαινάσι στρατηλατῶν.

'Because of this [Pentheus refusing to honour Dionysos] I shall prove to him that I am a god, and to all the Thebans. When I have set all in order here, I shall go to another land and manifest myself. But if this town of Thebes in anger seeks to drive the Bakchai by force of arms from the mountain, then I shall lead out my army of maenads and engage them in battle [μάχην understood].'

Prologue — expectation: battle, but...

But of course this is not what happens. Dionysos is opposed, Pentheus does decide in anger (809) to take his citizens armed to Kithairon — ὀργῇ σὺν ὅπλοις. But Dionysos' revenge is subtler and more ghastly than his first plan, and it falls not on the πόλις but on Pentheus alone — μόνος, three times repeated just before he goes to his death (961-4). 'Lead me through the midst of this land of the Thebans; alone of them I am the man who dares this', says Pentheus:

κόμιζε διὰ μέσης με Θηβαίας χθονός·
μόνος γὰρ αὐτῶν εἰμ' ἀνὴρ τολμῶν τόδε.

To this Dionysos replies, 'Alone you suffer for this city, alone. Therefore your destined ordeal is awaiting you':

μόνος σὺ πόλεως τῆσδ' ὑπερκάμνεις, μόνος·
τοιγάρ σ' ἀγῶνες ἀναμένουσιν οὓς ἐχρῆν.

And it is Pentheus alone who dies, not the body of men implied in Θηβαίων πόλις (50). This is very odd, for we expect a god's predictions to be carried out — or, at the least, some reason to be given for a change of plan.[27] But Dionysos gives no hint of it, and the change of direction comes suddenly at line 810, and, significantly, just after Pentheus has finally decided to go out and fight. I suggest that the most satisfactory explanation for this strange discrepancy is that in the Prologue Euripides was referring to the familiar version of the legend, and was leading his audience on to expect this as his conclusion too, so that his new version of Pentheus' death would have an even stronger effect. Certainly until line 810 the whole dramatic action seems to be moving towards the kind of confrontation forecast in the Prologue, with an armed Pentheus moving out to meet his fate as he does on the vases. Instead, after 810 Dionysos makes Pentheus mad and leads him in maenad's costume, alone, unarmed, insane, to the mountain where he is to be torn apart. The sheer dramatic impact of this turn in the action must have been immense.

the result is stronger drama in transvestism

Let us look in more detail at the opening scenes of the play, examining the way in which Euripides manipulates his audience's expectations of open combat between Pentheus and the maenads.

In the Prologue Dionysos lays more stress on the city of Thebes learning that he is a god than he does on Pentheus doing so. He explains that he has already driven all the women of the city mad from their homes on to the mountain (πᾶν τὸ θῆλυ σπέρμα Καδμείων, ὅσαι / γυναῖκες ἦσαν, ἐξέμηνα δωμάτων, 35-6); then continues, 'For this city must learn to the full, even if it does not wish to, that it is uninitiated into my Bacchic rites' (39-40):

[27] The only other extant play where a god's predictions in the Prologue do not come true is the *Ion*, but here reasons are given (see 1563ff). The case of *Hipp.* 42 is rather different: here Aphrodite's words demonstrate, according to Barrett (*Euripides: Hippolytos* (Oxford, 1964), 165), Euripides' intention 'to mislead and mystify without outright misstatement'.

δεῖ γὰρ πόλιν τήνδ' ἐκμαθεῖν, κεἰ μὴ θέλει,
ἀτέλεστον οὖσαν τῶν ἐμῶν βακχευμάτων.

Pentheus is then mentioned as being a θεομαχός who excludes Dionysos from his prayers and libations (45-6);[28] but again the men of Thebes are linked with Pentheus as needing to be shown that Dionysos is a god (αὐτῷ θεὸς γεγὼς ἐνδείξομαι / πᾶσιν τε Θηβαίοισιν, 47-8). 'Then', continues Dionysos, 'having set all to rights here (τἀνθένδε θέμενος εὖ) ..:'; so the stress is still on the whole city's recognizing Dionysos' godhead. Finally comes the definite prediction of what he will do if the city of Thebes 'in anger seeks to drive the Bakchai by force of arms from the mountain ' (50-2, with no mention at all of Pentheus): 'I shall lead out my army of maenads and engage them in battle' (ξυνάψω μαινάσι στρατηλατῶν, 52) — and Dodds notes on στρατηλατῶν that if this verb is used with the dative (μαινάσι) it stresses the physical act of leading. Because of this (ὧν οὕνεκ', 53) Dionysos himself is now in human form, and thus will be ready to take this revenge if necessary (53-4).

So the tragic outcome which the audience are now expecting is quite clear, and agrees with what seems to have been the pre-Euripidean version of the legend: if the men of Thebes reject Dionysos and go out angrily in a body to fetch the women back by force of arms (Pentheus with them, no doubt — since he has to die — but not yet expressly mentioned), then Dionysos himself in human shape will lead out his army of maenads against them. Thus the two sexes in Thebes are clearly divided: the women are already worshipping Dionysos on the mountain, while the men are expected to take military action to get them back. All seems to be ready for pitched battle, in the course of which Pentheus will be killed.

Euripides continues to lead his audience on in this expectation in the following scenes as well. Pentheus, in his scene with Kadmos and Teiresias, threatens to hunt the maenads from the mountain and chain them up (228, 231-2):

ὅσαι δ' ἄπεισιν, ἐξ ὄρους θηράσομαι ...
καὶ σφᾶς σιδηραῖς ἁρμόσας ἐν ἄρκυσιν
παύσω κακούργου τῆσδε βακχείας τάχα.

'Those who are at large I shall hunt from the mountain ... and soon put a stop to this Bacchic villainy by fitting them with iron fetters.'

We must be meant to assume force of arms in the hunt, and Dionysos' threatened reaction comes at once to mind. Then the Chorus, singing of Dionysos' powers, says that he sends φόβος among an army (302-4):

Ἄρεώς τε μοῖραν μεταλαβὼν ἔχει τινά·
στρατὸν γὰρ ἐν ὅπλοις ὄντα κἀπὶ τάξεσιν
φόβος διεπτόησε πρὶν λόγχης θιγεῖν.

'And he shares a certain portion of Ares' province, for sometimes fear strikes an army under arms and in its ranks with panic, before the men have touched a spear.'

This, on the surface, is very odd too, since this kind of terror was usually attributed to Pan, as our term 'panic' testifies.[29] Any connection between Dionysos and war was very tenuous, even paradoxical (consider the chorus at *Phoinissai* 784ff, where Dionysos and Ares are elaborately

[28] It is important to note that these lines emphasize that Pentheus is not irreligious, as he is sometimes called, since he does in fact worship the other gods. He can be called a θεομαχός only because he does not recognize Dionysos as a god to be worshipped. Thus Segal (n.7) is quite wrong to conclude (28) that Pentheus is 'violent, "savage", destructive of civilisation, an enemy of the Olympian gods' — quite the opposite, in fact. See also n.48 below.

[29] See Dodds ad loc.

contrasted[30]). But again this is easily explained if it is another reminder from Euripides to his audience of the kind of outcome which they are expecting when the Theban army goes to the mountain (ἐν ὅπλοις ὄντα, 303; cf. σὺν ὅπλοις, 51).

more expectations

In his long second scene with Dionysos, Pentheus finally decides to go and fight (809). But first he hears the messenger's story of the events on Kithairon, which should act as a warning to him if only he would listen. This tale is clearly meant as a doublet of later events, a foreshadowing of what will happen to Pentheus himself,[31] playing on the audience's expectations and full of ominous hints for the future. Here we have peace, rapidly turning to horror; flesh is torn and tossed, here that of cattle, later to be that of Pentheus. We have also the herdsmen on the mountain hiding in ambush until they leap out at the maenads, and then being put to flight by the maddened women. This too, I suggest, is another reference to the earlier version of the myth, leading the audience to expect Pentheus to do this also: to hide in ambush with his men, then to move out in confrontation and be pursued, and (a direr fate than that of the herdsmen) finally to be killed. The villagers too angrily seize their arms and rush out to fight (οἱ δ' ὀργῆς ὕπο / ἐς ὅπλ' ἐχώρουν, 758-9) before being routed, and here we have an echo of Dionysos' threats in the Prologue (ὀργῇ σὺν ὅπλοις, 51) which again reminds the audience of what they expect to happen to the Theban men under Pentheus' command.

Pentheus' immediate reaction to the messenger's story is decisive, as with pathetically grandiloquent words he orders out his army (778-85):

> ἤδη τόδ' ἐγγὺς ὥστε πῦρ ὑφάπτεται
> ὕβρισμα βακχῶν, ψόγος ἐς Ἕλληνας μέγας.
> ἀλλ' οὐκ ὀκνεῖν δεῖ· στεῖχ' ἐπ' Ἠλέκτρας ἰὼν
> πύλας· κέλευε πάντας ἀσπιδηφόρους
> ἵππων τ' ἀπαντᾶν ταχυπόδων ἐπεμβάτας
> πέλτας θ' ὅσοι πάλλουσι καὶ τόξων χερὶ
> ψάλλουσι νευράς, ὡς ἐπιστρατεύσομεν
> βάκχαισιν.
>
> 'Now close at hand blazes up like fire this outrage of the Bakchai, a great reproach to Greece. But we mustn't hesitate. Go to the Elektran Gate; bid all the shieldbearers and riders of swift-footed horses to muster, and all the peltasts and all who pluck the bowstring, and we shall march against the Bakchai.'

Στεῖχε, says Pentheus (780), and we assume that a servant leaves the stage to set in motion the military confrontation forecast in the Prologue. Thus when Dionysos replies, 'You must not take up arms against a god ... Bromios will not tolerate [οὐκ ἀνέξεται, a definite prediction] your driving his Bakchai from the holy hills' (790-1), the unquestioning expectation is of imminent battle, with Dionysos now at last carrying out his earlier threats. Pentheus encourages this expectation further, responding with decisive anger, 'I shall sacrifice [θύσω, a definite statement of intent], scattering women's blood, as they deserve, plentifully in Kithairon's glens' (796-7):

> θύσω, φόνον γε θῆλυν, ὥσπερ ἄξιαι,
> πολὺν ταράξας ἐν Κιθαιρῶνος πτυχαῖς.

[30] As R. P. Winnington-Ingram notes, *Euripides and Dionysus* (C. U. P., 1948, repr. Amsterdam, 1969), 51.

[31] Cf. 737 and 740: 'You might have seen ...', says the messenger, and indeed Pentheus will see something very similar while he still has eyes to see — as Winnington-Ingram notes (n.30, 96). Cf. also 747, with its suggestion of the closing of the eyes in death. 'The first messenger speech gives Pentheus the precise scenario for his own death and a chance, by learning through presentation, to avoid it': Foley (n.7), 244.

Dionysos gives an equally decisive statement of the outcome: 'You will all be put to flight [φεύξεσθε, again a definite prediction]. And that would be shameful, to have your shields of beaten bronze turned aside by the thyrsoi of the Bakchai' (798-9):

φεύξεσθε πάντες· καὶ τόδ' αἰσχρόν, ἀσπίδας
θύρσοισι βακχῶν ἐκτρέπειν χαλκηλάτους.

This is a reminder of earlier events, when the herdsmen on the mountain were routed, and of what the audience are expecting soon to be repeated in the future. All this is working up to Pentheus' final decision to march: the audience is waiting for it; and at line 809 it comes. 'Certainly I've made an agreement — that at least is true — but with the god', says Dionysos (808), and Pentheus, inflamed past all endurance, cries, 'Bring out my armour'; then, to the god, 'And *you* stop talking':

ἐκφέρετέ μοι δεῦρ' ὅπλα, σὺ δὲ παῦσαι λέγων.

Here, at this significant point, there comes a dramatic break in the action, emphasised by a break in the metre with the single response of Dionysos: 'ἆ', he cries, the sign of readjustment; and makes a complete change of direction to a quite different and unexpected revenge, on a Pentheus suddenly transformed from military strength to womanish weakness.[32] He begins to make Pentheus mad, just as he did the women of Thebes (ὥστρησ' ἐγὼ μανίαις, 32-3; ἐξέμηνα, 36).[33] We know that Pentheus' mind is no longer his own because suddenly he thinks and says the opposite of all that he has consistently affirmed before. His derangement, his sudden reversal of personality, is made quite clear in the text and would no doubt have been made even clearer on stage. First, and immediately following his final angry decision to lead out his army, we have Pentheus' instantaneous reversal from active to passive: we hear of his sudden desire to sit in silence under the pines and passively watch the women whose behaviour he had thought a few moments back exceeded all bounds (785-6), instead of facing them openly and controlling them by positive action. It is not, I believe, convincing to explain this sudden *volte-face* by saying that Pentheus has always had a submerged Dionysiac longing in himself which now breaks out, or a sexual obsession that makes him fascinated by the women's imagined actions, and I shall go into this point in more detail when I move on to discuss Pentheus'

[32] On the magnitude of the change at this turning point, see A. P. Burnett, 'Pentheus and Dionysus: Host and Guest' (*CP* 65 (1970), 15-29), 23-4: 'Quite suddenly a prophet who has been kind, effeminate, languid, weak, scorned and threatened with death, imaged as a hunted animal, becomes hard, bull-like, energetic and powerful, one who controls the lives of others and is described as a hunter is. In exactly the same moment a ruling prince undergoes the reverse transformation; forgetting his cruel, masculine strength, his contempt, and his public role, he becomes a creature who is pliable, womanish and weak, who is scorned, disguised and hunted like a beast. All this happens in a swift and magical pause that is marked by a break in the stychomythia ....' She goes on: 'The divine vengeance begins with [Dionysos'] very next words. "You wish, I think, to see the women at their rites?" the Stranger suavely asks (811), and with this suggestion Pentheus' carpet scene is inaugurated, his dismemberment begun.'

[33] Both Pentheus and Agaue have a change of φρένες actually on stage in this play — Pentheus moves from sanity to madness, Agaue from madness to sanity; both scenes may well reflect a late fifth century interest in the psyche.

Winnington-Ingram (n.30, 160) describes this maddening of Pentheus as 'a process comparable to hypnotism'. Rosenmeyer argues that this point marks a kind of death: 'The truth is that the change is not a transition from one phase of life to another, much less a lapse into sickness or perversion, but quite simply death. When a tragic hero in the great tradition is made to reverse his former confident choice, especially if this happens at the instigation of the arch-enemy, the role of the hero has come to an end. We remember Agamemnon stepping on the crimson carpet, after Clytemnestra has broken down his reluctance. The blood-colored tapestry is a visual anticipation of the murder. Instead of the corporeal death which will be set offstage, the audience watch the death of the soul. With Agamemnon slowly moving through the sea of red the contours are blurred and the king of all the Greeks is annihilated before our eyes. Aeschylus uses a splash; Euripides, less concretely but no less effectively, uses a change of personality.' (T. G. Rosenmeyer, 'Tragedy and Religion: the *Bacchae*', in *Oxford Readings in Greek Tragedy*, ed. E. Segal (Oxford, 1983, 370-89), 387.)

character and motivations.[34] Second, Pentheus' attitude to Dionysus himself is now completely transformed, and the Stranger, his former enemy, the man whom he saw as the source of all the troubles that have come to Thebes (again, I shall explore Pentheus' attitude to Dionysos in more detail below), now seems to him to speak wisely (818, 824, 826, 838). Pentheus can even say to him — apparently in all sincerity — 'How wise you have been all along' (ὡς τις εἶ πάλαι σοφός, 824). The Stranger offers to lead him (819), and his response to his enemy is immediate enthusiasm (ἀγ' ὡς τάχιστα, 820). Even when the Stranger admits that it was the god who taught him his wisdom (825), Pentheus' only reply is, 'So how can your good advice best be carried out?' (πῶς οὖν γένοιτ' ἂν ἃ σύ με νουθετεῖς καλῶς; 826): compare this with his instant flaming rage at 809 after a single mention of the Stranger's complicity with the god.

So the break in the metre at 810 marks the division between what had been familiar to the audience, and what was to be new and shocking. Instead of Pentheus going in military confidence with his men to the mountain, Dionysos invades Pentheus' mind and makes him mad; and the result of this is that he will even be willing to don the dress of a Bacchant, one of his former enemy's confederates (κακῶν συνεργοί, 512). In fact something of the old Pentheus surfaces when he three times balks at the idea of wearing woman's dress (822, 828, 836), so the audience is still kept guessing as to the final outcome, especially at what sounds like his final refusal after he has heard what this costume entails (831-5): 'I couldn't put on woman's dress!', he cries (οὐκ ἂν δυναίμην θῆλυν ἐνδῦναι στολήν, 836); and Dionysos responds, 'But you will cause bloodshed if you join battle with the Bakchai' (ἀλλ' αἷμα θήσεις συμβαλὼν βάκχαις μάχην, 837). With this the audience seem as if they might be moving back towards the outcome familiar to them. But then Pentheus capitulates: 'You're right. First I must go and reconnoitre' (ὀρθῶς· μολεῖν χρὴ πρῶτον εἰς κατασκοπήν, 838). So each time Dionysos overcomes his doubts. Finally at the end of the scene we have a last reminder of the man Pentheus used to be when he hesitates (845-6):

> στείχοιμ' ἄν· ἢ γὰρ ὅπλ' ἔχων πορεύσομαι
> ἢ τοῖσι σοῖσι πείσομαι βουλεύμασιν.
>
> 'I shall go in. Either I shall come out under arms — or I shall take your advice.'

So for a moment the outcome still seems uncertain. But Dionysos calls for madness, λύσσα, to invade Pentheus, admitting that only when mad will Pentheus put on woman's dress[35] (850-3):

> πρῶτα δ' ἔκστησον φρενῶν,
> ἐνεὶς ἐλαφρὰν λύσσαν· ὡς φρονῶν μὲν οὔ
> οὐ μὴ θελήσῃ θῆλυν ἐνδῦναι στολήν,
> ἔξω δ' ἐλαύνων τοῦ φρονεῖν ἐνδύσεται.
>
> 'First drive him out of his mind and put in him a light-headed madness. For never in his senses will he be willing to put on woman's dress, but driven out of his wits he will put it on.'

So Pentheus comes onstage after the next choral ode in woman's dress, now completely possessed by Dionysos' madness, 'dedicated', as he says himself (ἀνακείμεσθα, 934), to the god. The outcome is now settled: the action has swung violently away from the familiar and expected path of the earlier legend, and the play is ready to move to a new and tragic conclusion.

[34] See n.35 and pp.50ff below.

[35] This statement in itself is sufficient to disprove the idea that Pentheus has an underlying longing to partake in the Dionysiac rites. So also is Kadmos' statement to Agaue that Pentheus went to Kithairon to mock Dionysos and her Bacchic rites (1293). See also Seaford on Dodds ad 920-2, n.79 below.

The pre-Euripidean version of the legend is perhaps one of the reasons for the military imagery which Euripides uses so frequently in his description of Pentheus' venture into the mountains as a maenad: for instance Pentheus is called κατάσκοπος, scout, three times (916, 956, 981), and we have κατασκοπή in line 838, both military terms.[36] In line 819 we have ἐπιχειρεῖν ὁδῷ, 'attempt a journey', as in Herodotos of a military campaign.[37] In 1159 Dionysos is called a commander, προηγητήρ.[38] The maenads attack Pentheus with spears and the epic-sounding missiles χερμάδας κραταιβόλους;[39] on Pentheus' death they raise the ἀλαλαγή, the male war-cry (1133);[40] and κόρυς, helmet, is the term used of Pentheus' hair by Agaue when she carries his head home in triumph (1186). Dodds translates this as 'crest', and says, 'κόρυς does not occur elsewhere in this sense'.[41] Pentheus' robing of himself, too, can be seen as a fantastic inversion of an arming scene so familiar from Homer.[42] Perhaps these are all reminders of the old version of the legend, which are meant to set Euripides' innovations in deliberate contrast, to emphasize them, and — in the case of Agaue stroking her son's hair and calling it κόρυς — to stress their horror and poignancy.

This, then, is a summary of the literary and iconographic evidence which suggests that Euripides changed the traditional mode of Pentheus' death, introducing both his madness and his woman's costume. But before we move on to consider the implications of this new manner of death, we need to discuss in more detail the character and motivations of Pentheus, since on our evaluation of these will depend our responses to that death.

* * * * *

Two important points must be stressed in any evaluation of Pentheus and his actions. First of all he is very young; young like the young god, his opponent; hardly more than a boy, as Dodds notes on 974, where Dionysos calls him νεανίας (974-6):

> τὸν νεανίαν ἄγω
> τόνδ' εἰς ἀγῶνα μέγαν, ὁ νικήσων δ' ἐγὼ
> καὶ Βρόμιος ἔσται.
>
> 'I bring this young man to a great contest, and the victory will be with me and Bromios.'

We find νεανίας again in 274 (and cf. 1254); τέκνον, child, three times in Kadmos' speech of grief over Pentheus' corpse (1308, 1317, 1319); παῖς, boy, in 330 and 1226. And Agaue, when she carries Pentheus' head triumphantly in her arms, says over it (1185-7):

> νέος ὁ μόσχος ἄρ-
> τι γένυν ὑπὸ κόρυθ' ἁπαλότριχα
> κατάκομον θάλλει.

[36] Richard Hamilton ('*Bacchae* 47-52: Dionysus' Plan', *TAPA* 104 (1974), 139-49), 144, points out that Euripides uses this terminology only in the *Bakchai*, the *Rhesus* (nine times!), and once in the *Hecuba*, and that it is always clearly military. (Hamilton in fact sees the engagement which Dionysos predicts in the Prologue fulfilled in the 'warlike nature of Pentheus' misadventure in the mountains' (149). For convincing arguments against this conclusion, see Oranje (n.11), 74-5.)

[37] Hdt. 7.43.

[38] Cf. Xen. *Cyr.* 2.1.1, 4.2.27.

[39] On this see Hamilton (n.36), 144.

[40] See the discussion in Richard Seaford, 'The Eleventh Ode of Bacchylides' (*JHS* 108 (1988), 118-36), 134.

[41] Dodds (n.14) ad loc.

[42] See Segal (n.7), 169.

'The bull is young; his cheek is just growing downy under its crest of delicate hair.'[43]

As Dodds says, he is hardly more than a boy. But he adds, on νεανίας in 974, that here is 'the first preparation for a shift of sympathy which the next two scenes will bring about'. This is not entirely true; this is very much the reaction of a man reading the play quietly in his study. True, Pentheus' youth is here made explicitly clear in the text. But we have to remember the performance: Euripides' audience had the mask to judge by, and it would obviously have been the mask of a very young man throughout. From Pentheus' first entry they would have been basing all their reactions to him on the fact that he was so young.[44] We should do this too. But instead of this Pentheus is all too often damned; judged as a mature man is judged and found wanting. Dodds, for instance, calls him 'the dark puritan whose passion is compounded of horror and unconscious desire'; he accuses him of the 'sexual curiosity of a Peeping Tom', and of the 'traits of a typical tragedy tyrant'.[45] But we find that, if we look at the text and only at the text, this will not do. Pentheus is instead this very young king, very much aware of his responsibilities, who takes his duties as a ruler very seriously.

The second important point which must be stressed is that Pentheus does not know, as we the audience know, that the Stranger is in fact the god Dionysos. To him the Stranger is simply the beautiful, disruptive foreigner who is the sole cause of all the women of his city deserting their homes and going off to the mountain. Everything that Pentheus says and does arises from his conviction that the Stranger is simply a wicked charlatan, and thus it is crucial to judge all his reactions to Dionysos and his miracles in the light of this massive misconception.

Pentheus comes home to hear that all the women of his city have deserted their homes (216-25):

κλύω δὲ νεοχμὰ τήνδ' ἀνὰ πτόλιν κακά,
γυναῖκας ἡμῖν δώματ' ἐκλελοιπέναι
πλασταῖσι βακχείαισιν, ἐν δὲ δασκίοις
ὄρεσι θοάζειν, τὸν νεωστὶ δαίμονα
Διόνυσον, ὅστις ἔστι, τιμώσας χοροῖς·
πλήρεις δὲ θιάσοις ἐν μέσοισιν ἑστάναι
κρατῆρας, ἄλλην δ' ἄλλοσ' εἰς ἐρημίαν
πτώσσουσαν εὐναῖς ἀρσένων ὑπηρετεῖν,
προφάσιν μὲν ὡς δὴ μαινάδας θυοσκόους,
τὴν δ' Ἀφροδίτην πρόσθ' ἄγειν τοῦ Βακχίου.

'I hear of strange evils abroad in the city: that our women have left their homes on the pretence of Bacchic rites, and are gadding about in the dark

[43] Dodds' translation. Cf. 1174. <λέοντος ἀγροτέρου> νέον ἶνιν.

[44] And, as Dodds (n.14) says (197, with references): 'That is the one plea which a Greek audience would accept in extenuation of his conduct. The Greeks were very susceptible to the pathos inherent in the rashness of inexperienced youth.'

[45] Dodds (n.14), 97-8. Conacher (D. J. Conacher, *Euripidean Drama: Myth, Theme and Structure* (Toronto and London, 1967), 68) calls him a 'guilty puritan voyeur'. Others who take similar lines are, for instance, Charles Segal (n.7), passim; Michael Parsons, 'Self-knowledge Refused and Accepted: a Psychoanalytic Perspective on the *Bacchae* and the *Oedipus at Colonus*, *BICS* 35 (1988), 1-14; W. Sale, 'The Psychoanalysis of Pentheus in the *Bacchae* of Euripides', *YCS* 22 (1972), 63-82. For a more sympathetic view of Pentheus than is usually found, see E. M. Blaiklock, 'The Natural Man', *G&R* 16 (1947), 49-66; Rosenmeyer (n.33), esp. 385; H. D. Rankin, *Pentheus and Plato: a Study in Social Disintegration*, Inaugural Lecture at Southampton University (1975); Justina Gregory, 'Some Aspects of Seeing in Euripides' *Bacchae*', *G&R* 32 (1985), 23-31; and, most of all, H. Oranje's careful discussion (n.11), 34-98.

Seaford (*CQ* ns 31 (1981), 268) notes that Pentheus' youth is untypical of the tyrant of tragedy. And see Oranje, 176: 'One should perhaps question whether a term like "typical tragedy tyrant" would have meant anything to the Athenian audience, since Attic tragedy comprehended a broad range of kings.'

> mountain woods, honouring with dances this upstart god Dionysos, whoever he is; that full mixing bowls stand in the middle of their thiasoi; and that they creep, one here, one there, to solitude, to serve the lusts of men, on a pretence of being worshipping maenads, but really they rank Aphrodite in front of Bakchos.'

He has *heard* that all of these things are so (κλύω, 216, on which depends the entire passage), so these are by no means his prurient imaginings.[46] It is small wonder that Kadmos said at his approach, 'How excited he is!' (ὡς ἐπτόηται, 214).

Dodds suggests that Pentheus is made to harp on the charge of sexual promiscuity that we hear of first in 222-3, and certainly he does refer to it again several times (237f, 260-2, 353f, 487). However this is better explained not by his own abnormal psychology, but rather by the simple reason that, of all the charges levelled against the women, this is by far the worst and the one most damaging to his city. Gregory[47] is quite right to warn that we must 'recognise that what strikes us as sexual pathology in Pentheus, for example, might not have appeared in that light to an audience with different cultural references. It is salutary to recall that to the late Victorian J. E. Sandys Pentheus' concern for the virtue of the Theban women — in the view of modern critics a symptom of neurosis — was "a redeeming part of his character" '. It would have been so to Euripides and his audience also, I suggest: consider a passage such as *Andr.* 590ff, where this same careful attitude towards women can be seen when Menelaos is condemned by Peleus for taking no precautions (bolts and slaves) to see that Helen was suitably guarded and watched over. Thus, judging Pentheus' attitude in a fifth century context, it seems natural that, for the time being at least, the report of the women's sexual promiscuity lingers most persistently in his mind, and that he 'harps' on it. But he forgets all about it after he has heard the First Messenger's story about the maenads' violent deeds on the mountain, since now the women's supposed sexual licence has been quite overshadowed by their positive destructiveness, which is an even greater disruptive threat to his city. Only once more does he remember and refer to it, and that is in his final scene with Dionysos and under the influence of the god's madness when Pentheus has lost all sense of reality: just as his earlier reasoned decision to control the maenads by force of arms is here transformed into the crazy idea of overcoming them by uprooting the whole of Mount Kithairon (945-54),[48] so his earlier down-to-earth statement of the sexual situation as he understood it (222-3) becomes fanciful, waxing pretty and lyrical (957-8):

> καὶ μὴν δοκῶ σφᾶς ἐν λόχμαις ὄρνιθας ὡς
> λέκτρων ἔχεσθαι φιλτάτοις ἐν ἔρκεσιν.

> 'I say, I fancy they are in the bushes, like birds held fast in the sweetest clutches of love.'

But here Dionysos' immediate response refers us back to the Pentheus of the earlier scenes of the play, whose major concern was to be a φύλαξ to his city (959-60):

> οὐκοῦν ἐπ' αὐτὸ τοῦτ' ἀποστέλλῃ φύλαξ·
> λήψῃ δ' ἴσως σφᾶς, ἢν σὺ μὴ ληφθῇς πάρος.

[46] See also Seaford (n.40), 126: 'That maenadism involves the dangers of extra-marital sex was believed not only by Pentheus but ... by fifth century vase-painters, who show maenads with Dionysos and his constantly lascivious followers, the satyrs.' See also p.55 and n.55 below.

[47] Gregory (n.45), 23.

[48] And we notice (951-4) that it is reverence for Pan and the Nymphs which deters him from this — again a reminder that Pentheus is not irreligious (see n.28 above).

> 'And so you go as a guardian against that very thing; perhaps you will catch them — if you are not caught first.'

So Pentheus' good motives in this respect are exactly what Dionysos has recognized, and the effect of his sneering reply is to increase sympathy for his crazed and uncomprehending victim, especially when he follows it with a sinister threat of what we know must be death.

Furthermore, following this report of the women's behaviour on the mountain, Pentheus has been *told* about the actions of the dangerously seductive Stranger (233-8):

> λέγουσι δ' ὡς τις εἰσελήλυθε ξένος,
> γόης ἐπῳδὸς Λυδίας ἀπὸ χθονός,
> ξανθοῖσι βοστρύχοισιν εὐοσμῶν κόμην,
> οἰνῶπας ὄσσοις χάριτας Ἀφροδίτης ἔχων,
> ὃς ἡμέρας τε κεὐφρόνας συγγίγνεται
> τελετὰς προτείνων εὐίους νεάνισιν.
>
> 'They say a stranger has arrived, a wizard enchanter from Lydia, with scented golden curls and the charms of Aphrodite wine-dark in his eyes, who day and night consorts with young girls, dangling before them his mysteries of joy.'

Again this is all report rather than Pentheus' prurient fantasies, since the entire passage depends on λέγουσι (233). Pentheus' words συγγίγνεται ... νεάνισιν (237-8) are purposely suggestive,[49] and emphasize his conviction that it is the Stranger who is at the root of the women's desertion of their homes and the disruption of his city. So there can be no hope that the Stranger will win any credence from the king: '*This* is the man', cries Pentheus, 'who says that Dionysos is a god; *this* is the man who says that he was sewn into the thigh of Zeus' (242-3). As Dodds notes: 'The repeated ἐκεῖνος is very emphatic — *this* is the disreputable charlatan on whose word the story of Dionysos' divinity depends.' Thus the Stranger's words are utter blasphemy worthy of hanging (ταῦτ' οὐχὶ δεινῆς ἀγχόνης ἔστ' ἄξια; 246), and from here on there is absolutely no way that Pentheus can give credence to even the possibility of Dionysos' being a god. Kadmos and Teiresias will speak eloquently on Dionysos' behalf, but neither will have any power to influence Pentheus since they will be talking of a 'god' whom the Stranger is trying to promote, and so Pentheus must remain deaf to all their good advice (and to the good advice later of the Messenger also (769-74), especially since this advice closes with a reference to the pleasures of Aphrodite that the wine of Dionysos helps to bring about which, in the light of the current situation, can only add fuel to the flames of Pentheus' anger).

To these various reports about the women and the Stranger, Pentheus reacts just as a responsible and rational ruler would act: the women must be brought home (228-32), and his city saved from chaos; the Stranger must have his head cut off (τράχηλον σώματος χωρὶς τεμών, 241). As Dodds says, the phrase is brutal; but surely deliberately so, to stress the depths of the Stranger's iniquity (and also because it is a nice irony, since Pentheus himself is to suffer decapitation[50]). Pentheus' rational judgements are wrong, but for all the right reasons: if the Stranger really were simply the Stranger, then we should say that he acts entirely soundly. He is only wrong because he does not know, as we do, that the Stranger is Dionysos, and thus fails to recognize any validity in the new religion — and Euripides has so arranged matters that it is quite impossible for him to do so, quite impossible for him to see the god as anything other than the seductive charlatan who has brought his city into danger, and thus the new religion as anything other than socially destructive.

[49] See Dodds ad loc.

[50] Just as Pentheus will threaten Dionysos with death by stoning (356f), while he himself will be pelted by the maenads (1096-1100).

In his desire to save his city Pentheus sees Teiresias as standing in his way with his arguments from a 'religious' point of view, and Kadmos as well, with his political arguments and his willingness to lie about the god out of false family pride. All of these must seem to Pentheus to be of little relevance in the current crisis — a betrayal, in fact, in favour of the enemy Stranger — and he dismisses them with impatience. Certainly he loves Kadmos: affection shines through in 250-4, and we later hear of his love for his grandfather from Kadmos' own lips (1308-22); but he feels that the old man should know better than to demonstrate such foolishness. 'Keep your hands off me', he cries, 'Go off to your Bacchic rites, and don't wipe your folly off on me' (343-4):

> οὐ μὴ προσοίσεις χεῖρα, βακχεύσεις δ' ἰών,
> μηδ' ἐξομόρξῃ μωρίαν τὴν σὴν ἐμοί;[51]

He sees Teiresias as the cause of all this folly (σὺ ταῦτ' ἔπεισας, 255; τῆς σῆς <δ'> ἀνοίας τόνδε τὸν διδάσκαλον, 345), and with some justice, since in the earlier part of this scene it has certainly seemed as if Teiresias were the dominant partner, telling Kadmos what to do in answer to his deferential questions (184-6, 191, 193, 195).

Before Teiresias utters his arguments in favour of Dionysos' divinity, Pentheus says that if he were not so old he would be punished for introducing wicked rites, and again we see that the young king's major concern is the defilement of the women which these rites bring about (258-62):

> εἰ μὴ σε γῆρας πολιὸν ἐξερρύετο,
> καθῆσ' ἂν ἐν βάκχαισι δέσμιος μέσαις,
> τελετὰς πονηρὰς εἰσάγων· γυναιξὶ γὰρ
> ὅπου βότρυος ἐν δαιτὶ γίγνεται γάνος,
> οὐχ ὑγιὲς οὐδὲν ἔτι λέγω τῶν ὀργίων.

> 'If your grey old age did not protect you, you would be sitting bound in the middle of the Bacchants for introducing wicked rites. For I say that where women have the sparkle of the grape at their festivities, there is no longer anything wholesome in their rituals.'

However after Teiresias has produced his (to Pentheus) heretical arguments, and Kadmos has agreed with him, adding his own political and personal reasons for accepting Dionysos as a god, Pentheus is so angry that he orders Teiresias to be punished after all. We as audience know that this is wrong and dangerous, because the prophet is in fact right in all that he has said about Dionysos, but to Pentheus Teiresias is simply an utter traitor to the (true) gods, especially of course to Apollo, and so he will have his seat of prophecy demolished.

Pentheus then returns to what is at the forefront of his mind: the Stranger who is at the root of his city's troubles; and he continues the angry deliberations that were interrupted by his catching sight of Kadmos and Teiresias in their Bacchic trappings. Lines 352ff could in fact be a direct continuation of his words at 246-7, with the effect of suggesting that the intervening 104 lines have been merely an interlude irrelevant to the real issue at stake (352-4):

> οἵ δ' ἀνὰ πόλιν στείχοντες ἐξιχνεύσατε
> τὸν θηλύμορφον ξένον, ὃς ἐσφέρει νόσον
> καινὴν γυναιξὶ καὶ λέχη λυμαίνεται.

[51] Dodds notes: 'His violent horror of such contact is a fine psychological stroke: something in him knows already the fascination and mortal peril which the new rites hold for him.' But this is reading too much into the passage (and see n.35 above). See Orange's discussion (n.11, p.45), and his interpretation: 'You cannot clean yourself of your madness by wiping it off on me.' He adds: 'The sarcasm leaves no room for fascination, or for a premonition of mortal danger.' I would suggest that this is righteous indignation rather than sarcasm.

'The rest of you go through the city and hunt out this womanish Stranger, who is introducing a new disease for our women and defiling their beds.'

Again, as discussed above, this is not a sexual obsession. It is simply that Pentheus' city and its women are still at grave risk, and the Stranger must be caught, stopped, punished. Now, presumably in response to Teiresias' arguments, Pentheus' idea of suitable punishment has changed, and he wants the Stranger stoned to death, the method of execution used especially for sacrilege.[52]

At the beginning of the Second Episode it seems that everything is moving towards this end just as Pentheus would wish it. The Stranger is brought to him bound, and Pentheus seems reassured when he sees that the amorous appearance of his captive accords exactly with all that he has heard about him (453-9, cf. 233-8, especially 235-6) and thus confirms the Stranger's reasons for coming to Thebes (453-4): this must then justify Pentheus in a straightforward course of action.[53] But the affair is not to be so easily settled. He questions the Stranger closely about the new religion prior to punishing him, and the Stranger does nothing to ease Pentheus' anxieties, but rather confirms them, and obstructs him with his clever and bewildering quibbles (474-5, 478-9, 490-1; and later 649-50, 654-5, 800-1, 804-5),[54] confusing what to Pentheus is a straightforward issue to be simply and rationally solved. They speak on two entirely different levels, Pentheus on the literal, Dionysos on the allegorical with irony and double meanings in his words. Lines 506-7 in particular emphasise this contrast: 'You do not know what your life is, nor what you are doing, nor who you are,' says Dionysos; and Pentheus, blind to any deeper meaning, answers prosaically, 'Pentheus, son of Agaue, and my father was Echion'.

Pentheus asks if the sacred rites are celebrated by night or by day (485). 'By night', comes the response; and on Pentheus' reply that in darkness there is treachery and corruption for women (487) Dodds notes, 'Pentheus excitedly smells immorality again'. But no: this is a natural attitude based partly, perhaps, on the known moral dangers of nocturnal rites in general,[55] but certainly also on the clear moral dangers of these rites in particular if conducted by the false and seductive Stranger. Thus Pentheus is once more referring to his main concern in the present situation, the behaviour of the women on the mountain. So he is right to feel this anxiety about the rites, and is naturally angry (489) when the Stranger fobs him off with another quibbling reply which, even if true in general, is clearly far from helpful in the current explosive situation.

Just as the next scene builds up to Pentheus' decision to march out with his men to the mountain (809), which is finally brought about by a particularly infuriating statement by

[52] See Dodds (n.14) ad loc. He further suggests (ad 246-7) that Pentheus' inconsistency in threats of punishment for the Stranger is understandable since Pentheus is 'in a temper'. Though I agree with the content of what he says, I take issue with his choice of words, since to call Pentheus 'in a temper' is to diminish his entirely justified anger into something petty.

However, for all his threats, Pentheus' actual punishment of the Stranger (492ff), after giving him an extended hearing, is relatively mild (see Oranje (n.11), 64 and n.163).

[53] This seems to me a much more straightforward reading of the text, especially in view of 453-4, than the suggestion that Euripides is trying to show a suppressed sensuality in Pentheus, expressed by, for instance, Parsons (n.45), 6: 'Pentheus ... projects on to Dionysos the sexuality he cannot tolerate in himself.'

[54] As Segal says (n.7, 267): 'Instead of the constancy, directness, univocal language of the heroic and hoplite ideal to which Pentheus adheres, Dionysos' playfulness embodies shifting and change, guile, deviousness.' See also Hans Diller ('Euripides' Final Phase: the *Bacchae*', *Oxford Readings in Greek Tragedy*, ed. E. Segal (Oxford, 1983), 357-69, here 365): 'Dionysos in his behaviour towards his adversary aims not to convert, but to confuse and entangle him more deeply.'

[55] See all the references in Dodds ad 222-3, 487-9; and consider all the New Comedy girls seduced at a παννυχίς. The members of the Chorus also link Dionysos with Aphrodite (402-5), as later does the Messenger (773-4).

Dionysos (808), so this scene builds up to Pentheus' decision to imprison the Stranger, which also is brought about by one final, maddeningly enigmatic response. 'Where is the god?', asks Pentheus (501), and Dionysos replies, 'Where I am. You yourself are impious and so do not see him' (παρ' ἐμοί· σὺ δ' ἀσεβὴς αὐτὸς ὢν οὐκ εἰσορᾷς, 502). 'Seize him', cries Pentheus; 'He is scorning me and Thebes' (λάζυσθε· καταφρονεῖ με καὶ Θήβας ὅδε, 503). Thus, at the climax of this scene, Euripides makes it clear that Pentheus sees the issue between him and the Stranger as no mere personal one, but is deeply concerned in it — and indeed moving inexorably towards his own destruction because of it — with his city in the forefront of his mind.

Dionysos is imprisoned, but, as we hear from the god himself, he escapes during the 'palace miracles' while Pentheus fights bull and fire to the point of exhaustion. In the Third Episode Dionysos appears outside again, calm and free, to the bewildered anger of Pentheus, who responds on a rational level to all these incredible events by ordering the city gates to be locked (653). Following fast on this we hear the First Messenger's report of the maenads' violent deeds on the mountain.[56] Pentheus is very keen to hear it, since (and again we get a clear glimpse of the concerns motivating him) he believes that he will gain from it evidence to convict his hated enemy, the Stranger, who is the cause of the evil affecting his Theban women, as he himself explains (674-6):

> ὅσῳ δ' ἂν εἴπῃς δεινότερα βακχῶν πέρι,
> τοσῷδε μᾶλλον τὸν ὑποθέντα τὰς τέχνας
> γυναιξὶ τόνδε τῇ δίκῃ προσθήσομεν.
>
> 'The more terrible the things you tell me about the Bakchai, the sterner the punishment I shall inflict on the man who taught our women their wickedness.'

First the Messenger tells of the peaceful maenads and their miracles. This picture of peace does of course refute the earlier report made to Pentheus of lechery and drunkenness, as the Messenger points out (686-8). But then he goes on to tell of the maenads' destructive violence, their incomprehensible, dangerous power, and both the earlier peace and the even earlier report of drunken sexual licence are forgotten, paled into insignificance by this positive and active menace. Now the women have become enemies to Thebes, and to all civilized society (πολέμιοι, 752). Clearly Pentheus must act and, judging the situation rationally as always, taking courageous practical action against this new and powerful threat in the only way he believes possible, he calls for his army to muster. Shortly afterwards, making his last sane decision, he calls for his arms (809). From this point on Dionysos will take possession of his mind and he will no longer be himself. But up to this point his motivations have been good and his reactions — if this had been a 'real life' situation where the power of reason might be expected to rule — sound. He is destroyed because he does not recognize, is not allowed to recognize, that he is up against the divine, that the amazing events which he has seen and heard about are the genuine miracles of a god[57] and that he is in fact acting as a θεομαχός.

The Pentheus in Euripides' text, therefore, is in fact a rather different Pentheus from the one who is all too easily assumed if one approaches that text with modern values and psychological

[56] Much mileage is made out of the Messenger's comments about Pentheus' quick temper (668-71) by those who wish to see in Pentheus the 'typical tragedy tyrant'. But the Messenger has heard much of Pentheus' explosion of rage against the Stranger (645ff) while making his long, visible walk on stage, so such comments as his would be quite explicable in performance simply by the stage action.

[57] 'Miracles cannot happen in Pentheus' ordered world': Blaiklock (n.45), 56. As Gregory (n.45) comments, 29, 'Both his perceptions and his responses are drawn from the realm of the secular and of the everyday'.

assumptions in mind,[58] and is a far more sympathetic character than is generally acknowledged. This does, of course, make his death at his mother's hands all the more pitiful. So, of course, does the fact that he is so young, so close to the age when her attitude to him would have been all protective love and care.

Thus, to sum up the argument so far, Euripides has created this young soldier-king who, in seeking to save his city, persists in clinging to rationality in the face of Dionysos and his power. The action of the play builds up towards his leading out his army against the women on the mountain, but as soon as he has taken his final, apparently irrevocable decision to march, the action swings from the familiar path of the myth to a new and quite unexpected direction:[59] Pentheus is made mad by the god and, while mad, dons maenad's dress;[60] then returns to the stage for the last time, a travesty — in every sense of the word — of his former self. An audience which had been expecting Pentheus to march out would surely have found the toilet scene almost unbearable: armour changed for women's robes and a courageous spirit now concerned only with feminine fussiness and vanity. But before we discuss this and the following scenes in more detail, let us consider the possibility that Euripides was the first to have Pentheus killed by his own mother.

* * * * *

Again the evidence for this innovation of Pentheus' death at his mother's hands comes from both vase-paintings and literature. As for the iconographic evidence: the death of Pentheus was a popular subject, but nowhere is Agaue identified on the vases. This is, however, not quite an *argumentum ex silentio*, since on a red-figure psykter in Boston of about 520, the maenad rending Pentheus' torso is named Galene (Plate 3a).[61] The same name is given to one of the maenads with Dionysos on a red-figure bell-krater of about 430.[62] Moreover there is a piece of literary evidence too which supports this suggestion of Agaue being a first-time murderess in the *Bakchai*, and that coming from Euripides himself. In Euripides' own *Medea* of 431 B.C. the Chorus sing (1282ff) of Ino as 'one woman, the only one, who in time past raised her hand against her own children':

> μίαν δὴ κλύω μίαν τῶν πάρος
> γυναῖκ' ἐν φίλοις χέρα βαλεῖν τέκνοις·
> Ἰνὼ μανεῖσαν ἐκ θεῶν ....

[58] I realise that in this modern era it can be difficult to take a character in Greek Tragedy at face value, without taking current psychological assumptions into account. Nevertheless, if we mean to evaluate a play within its historical context, it should be done — if at all possible. Sometimes it is almost impossible: consider Iokaste's statement at *O. T.* 981-2 — 'Many a man before this has in dreams lain with his own mother'. How can we ever forget what we know from Freud and persuade ourselves back two and a half thousand years to imagine either the state of mind that wrote those lines or the way in which the audience responded?

[59] A typical comment on the reversal at line 810 is that made by H. D. F. Kitto (*Greek Tragedy* (London, 1939), 376), who says: 'The whole plot ... is so well constructed and balanced that it is made to turn visibly at this one point.' The 'turn', the reversal, is more significant than is generally realized.

Let me quote here Michael Haslam, from a personal communication, who has independently reached similar conclusions to myself on this part of the legend and who is publishing his findings elsewhere: 'When Pentheus goes to the mountain it will be without anger, without weapons, without men: in command of no one at all, not even himself: not leading, but led: and god-fighter no longer, but in thrall, and unmanned.'

[60] If Euripides meant the costuming of Pentheus by Dionysos to be part of a 'play within a play' as Foley (n.7), for instance, argues (205-58), then this would suggest a theatrical self-consciousness appropriate to the later fifth century (206), and thus too an innovation by Euripides himself (possibly inspired by the toilet scene in Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusai*, suggests Foley: see 228).

[61] Boston 10.221; Brommer (n.16) 485 B1; Philippart (n.16) no. 150; *ARV*$^2$ 16, 14.

[62] *LIMC* IV.1, p.153 no.2. S. Reinach, *Repertoire des vases peints — grecs et etrusques* (Paris, 1900), vol.ii, fig. 6.3.

Page notes that they might have added Agaue[63] — but not, of course, if this child-murder was a later innovation by Euripides.

It is true that the evidence for this innovation is less full than that for Euripides' innovations of Pentheus' madness and woman's dress. Nevertheless one can also argue that it is just the kind of thing that Euripides would have chosen to do, since we know that in one other play, the *Medea*, he innovated a child-murder by a mother.[64] The success of this may well have moved him to repeat the innovation, though in a very different dramatic context.[65] Another obvious parallel is that of Herakles, who kills his family while mad. There are similarities also with the *Hippolytos*, where Theseus curses his son to death through blindness to the truth. Thus Euripides seems to have been particularly interested in having people killed by those who really love them and do so out of madness (Agaue, Herakles), misapprehension (Theseus), or some overpowering emotion (Medea). And not only by human killers: consider the emphasis on Hippolytos' own horses who bring him to his death even though he reared them (*Hipp.* 1240, ὦ φάτναισι ταῖς ἐμαῖς τεθραμμέναι), and, in the *Bakchai* itself, the hounds of Aktaion, who tear their own master to pieces, the very man who reared them (ὠμόσιτοι σκύλακες ἃς ἐθρέψατο / διεσπάσαντο, 338-9).

Euripides seems also to have been particularly interested in mother/son recognitions. The scene in the fragmentary *Kresphontes*, where Merope, on the point of killing her son with an axe, recognizes him just in time, was famous in antiquity and is mentioned by Aristotle as a highly effective tragic incident.[66] It seems that the *Alexandros* had a somewhat similar scene, where Hekabe tries to kill Paris but discovers that he is her son;[67] and in the *Ion*, of course, we have a moving recognition scene extant between a son and the mother who had in ignorance tried — but luckily failed — to murder him. In all of these plays tragedy is averted at the last instant. It would be but a small step to have that murder of a son by a mother actually take place, and the recognition scene occur tragically too late — a small step, but one that would be very dramatically effective and also, I feel, very Euripidean.

It might be objected that Agaue as killer of her son was a traditional part of the legend, because other myths of opposition to Dionysos have the same motif: Minyad mothers, for instance, kill their own children. But this is not always the case: take another Dionysos legend, that of Lykourgos. In an early version of this legend, in Homer (*Il.* 6.130-40), Lykourgos drove away Dionysos and his 'nurses' with an ox-goad so that Dionysos in terror fled into the sea. For punishment Lykourgos was blinded by Zeus, and after that had only a short while to live since the gods hated him. In Eumelos too he was blinded by Zeus (fr.10 Kinkel). But in later legend this punishment changed: he was driven mad, and while mad killed his own son, thinking he was cutting at a vine. Apollodoros (3.5.1) tells the story.[68] But this version was much earlier than Apollodoros, since the episode also occurs on vase-paintings, the earliest

[63] D. L. Page, *Euripides: Medea* (Oxford, 1952), xx n.8.

[64] See Page (n.63), xxiii ff.

[65] See Webster (n.15), 274-7: 'I believe that when Euripides departs from the traditional story, his departure often takes a shape which has been successful in an earlier play.' He suggests in this context that Agaue bringing in the head of Pentheus on her thyrsos is a reminiscence of Orestes bringing Aigisthos' head to Elektra in the *El.*, and that this reminiscence is evidence of such a departure from the traditional story.

[66] Arist. *Poet.* 1454 a. See Webster (n.15), 137-43, for a discussion of the plot of the *Kresphontes*.

[67] See R. A. Coles, *A New Oxyrhynchus Papyrus: the Hypothesis of Euripides' Alexandros*, *BICS* Suppl. 32 (1974).

[68] For a discussion of Sophokles' (and others') use of the Lykourgos legend, see Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood's article in this volume.

evidence being a hydria of about 440 (Plate 3b).[69] So it was current well before the *Bakchai* (it may be that Aischylos used it in his Lykourgos trilogy[70]), and in fact it could have given Euripides the idea of making Agaue also the killer of her own son. Or of course the idea may even have come directly from such Dionysiac myths as those of the Minyads, where mothers rend their children.

Other possible influences on Euripides are from religion and ritual. Richard Seaford has argued that many details in the *Bakchai* derive from the ritual of mystic initiation into the cult of Dionysos.[71] He notes that in the myth of the death and rebirth of the child Dionysos, the god's torn limbs are reassembled by his mother:[72] perhaps this suggested the moving recomposition onstage of the limbs of Pentheus, the sacrificial victim who becomes identified with the god,[73] by the mother; and, by a further extension, the actual *sparagmos* of the son by the mother herself. This would have perhaps seemed especially suitable for performance at a festival expressly designed to honour Dionysos.[74]

Thus there seems good reason to allow the possibility that Euripides introduced the killing of Pentheus at his mother's hands,[75] as well as his going to Kithairon insane and in woman's dress. So let us now consider the later scenes of the play with all three of these supposed innovations in mind.

* * * * *

At the end of the Third Episode Pentheus goes into the house from which he will emerge only once more, mad and in maenad's costume. Dionysos will shortly join him, but first the god tells the audience explicitly the nature of the ordeals which Pentheus must endure — and here Euripides seems to be not only summing up his own innovations to the myth, but also assailing his audience with a series of escalating horrors. Pentheus is to be made mad, and mad he will be willing to put on woman' dress, which in his right mind he never would; not only this, but he will be laughed at by the Thebans in his woman's dress, thus giving sweet revenge to Dionysos; not only will this dress make him a figure of mockery, but it will also be the funerary dress which he must wear to Hades; not only must he die, but — and here we come to the climax of the horrors — he will be killed at his mother's hands (849-60):

> Διόνυσε, νῦν σὸν ἔργον· οὐ γὰρ εἶ πρόσω
> τεισώμεθ' αὐτόν. πρῶτα δ' ἔκστησον φρενῶν,
> ἐνεὶς ἐλαφρὰν λύσσαν· ὡς φρονῶν μὲν εὖ
> οὐ μὴ θελήσῃ θῆλυν ἐνδῦναι στολήν,
> ἔξω δ' ἐλαύνων τοῦ φρονεῖν ἐνδύσεται.
> χρῄζω δέ νιν γέλωτα Θηβαίοις ὀφλεῖν
> γυναικόμορφον ἀγόμενον δι' ἄστεως

[69] Cracow 1225; *ARV*$^2$ 1121.17; *CV* pl.12, 1. For a discussion of this and later vases, see Dana Ferrin Sutton, 'A Series of Vases Illustrating the Madness of Lycurgus', *Riv. di St. Class.* 23 (1975), 356-60.

[70] See Sutton (n.69) passim; Dodds (n.14), xxxiii; and M. L. West's full discussion in 'Tragica VI', *BICS* 30 (1983), 63-71.

[71] See the articles quoted in n.10 above.

[72] *CQ* 31 (1981), 267.

[73] See further below, pp.63f.

[74] See on this Seaford, *CQ* 31 (1981), 266ff; and P. E. Easterling, 'Putting together the Pieces: a Passage in the *Bacchae*', *Omnibus* 14 (1987), 14-16.

[75] What then of Agaue in earlier versions of the legend? If she was not the killer of Pentheus, then she would presumably have been the main receiver of the messenger speech announcing Pentheus' death in battle against the maenads and the chief mourner of that death. There would have been nothing similar to the final scene in Euripides' play where Agaue, full of self-blame, recomposes Pentheus' broken body and grieves over it.

ἐκ τῶν ἀπειλῶν τῶν πρίν, αἶσι δεινὸς ἦν.
ἀλλ' εἶμι κόσμον ὅνπερ εἰς Ἅιδου λαβὼν
ἄπεισι μητρὸς ἐκ χεροῖν κατασφαγείς,
Πενθεῖ προσάψων· γνώσεται δὲ τὸν Διὸς
Διόνυσον ...

'Dionysos, now the task is yours, for you are not far away. Let us be revenged on him. First drive him out of his mind and put in him a light-headed madness. For never in his senses will he be willing to put on woman's dress, but driven out of his wits he will put it on. I long for him to incur laughter from the Thebans when he is led in woman's shape through the town, after his earlier threats which made him so terrible. But I will go and put on Pentheus the dress which he will wear on his journey to Hades, dead at his mother's hands. And he will know the son of Zeus, Dionysos ....'

If indeed Agaue's killing of Pentheus is an innovation by Euripides, then here it is made explicit for the first time, and the knowledge of it would have come as the dreadful climax of this scene which had already overturned all the audience's relatively comfortable expectations. It is directly followed by one of Euripides' loveliest lyrics, with its magical image of the young fawn playing in a green meadow which poignantly underlines this latest horror (866-76):

ὡς νεβρὸς χλοεραῖς ἐμπαί-
ζουσα λειμακος ἡδοναῖς,
ἡνίκ' ἂν φοβερὰν φύγῃ
θήραν ἔξω φυλακᾶς
εὐπλέκτων ὑπὲρ ἀρκύων,
θωύσσων δὲ κυναγέτας
συντείνῃ δράμημα κυνῶν·
μόχθοις τ' ὠκυδρόμοις τ' ἀέλ-
λαις θρῴσκει πεδίον
παραποτάμιον, ἡδομένα
βροτῶν ἐρημίαις σκιαρο-
κόμοιό τ' ἔρνεσιν ὕλας.

'Like a fawn playing in the green joys of a meadow, when she has escaped the fearful hunt, away from the watchers and over the woven nets, and the shouting huntsman urges on his running hounds. With hard effort and gusts of swift racing she leaps along the water-meadow, rejoicing in the places empty of men and the green growth of the wood with its shady leaves.'

The Chorus liken themselves to the fawn which has escaped death, but to the audience the vulnerability of the fawn in the hunt brings to mind the vulnerability of Pentheus in all its suddenly realized horror. This is made worse because implicit in the image of any vulnerable young creature is the image of the all-protecting mother, and instead of protecting, Pentheus' mother will, they now know, destroy. Indeed she becomes the pitiless huntsman of 871-2, where we have a reminder of her own words when she urged on her maenads to attack the herdsmen.[76] But, unlike the fawn, the young Pentheus will not escape: there will be no more playing in a green meadow for him, since his own mother will hunt him down to death, and in a setting as wild and free as that of the young fawn's joyous respite.

The pathos of this is emphasized by the two refrains (877-81, 897-901), which contain an old proverb once sung by the Muses at the wedding of Kadmos and Harmonia[77] and now used by

[76] 731-2; cf. also the future reality of 1091-3.

[77] See Dodds ad loc.

the Chorus to try to justify the murder of Pentheus, the couple's grandson. The antistrophe further emphasizes the injustice of Pentheus' death, since here the Chorus sing of the divine vengeance due to the man who fails to honour the gods, and Pentheus is by no means an atheist — quite the contrary,[78] as we know from 45-6 where Dionysos speaks of being excluded from Pentheus' prayers and libations. Pentheus' only mistake is to fail to realize that this new god Dionysos is in fact a god. In the epode they sing again of release from troubles, and end, 'The man whose life is happy day by day, him do I count blessed' (τὸ δὲ κατ' ἦμαρ ὅτῳ βίοτος / εὐδαίμων, μακαρίζω, 910-11). At these words Pentheus, who is now to have no more days at all, happy or otherwise, comes on stage led by his destroyer.

This Fourth Episode is to us perhaps one of the most painful scenes in Greek Tragedy, and surely would have been even more so to an audience familiar with a Pentheus who went to a less humiliating death, in his right mind and fighting the maenads. Throughout, just as there was at the end of the previous scene after the turning point of 810, there is continual stress on reversal, on the contrast between how things were and how they are now; and perhaps we have here Euripides' particular emphasis on the new direction that his play was taking.

The scene between Pentheus and Dionysos falls into three sections. The first section (912-24) introduces the now completely insane Pentheus. Dionysos calls him outdoors: 'Come out in front of the house', he cries, 'and let me see you dressed as a woman, a mad woman, a Bacchant, to spy on your mother and her company' (914-16):

> ἔξιθι πάροιθε δωμάτων, ὄφθητί μοι,
> σκευὴν γυναικὸς μαινάδος βάκχης ἔχων,
> μητρός τε τῆς σῆς καὶ λόχου κατάσκοπος.

We note the cumulative, withering scorn of γυναικὸς μαινάδος βάκχης (915), and the way in which this is linked with Pentheus' role of κατάσκοπος. Pentheus comes out, saying that he sees double — two suns, two cities of Thebes — and that Dionysos seems to him to be in the form of a bull. Dionysos explains his beast manifestation to Pentheus by saying that now all has changed from what it was (923-4):

> ὁ θεὸς ὁμαρτεῖ, πρόσθεν ὢν οὐκ εὐμενής,
> ἐνσπονδος ἡμῖν· νῦν δ' ὁρᾷς ἃ χρή σ' ὁρᾶν.

> 'The god accompanies us — before he was hostile, and now is an ally; now you see what you should see.'[79]

In the second section (925-44) there is a concentration on Pentheus' new dress, and stage business with his costume as Dionysos arranges it. Lines 930-1 give us the pathetic picture of Pentheus acting the Bacchant indoors:

> ἔνδον προσείων αὐτὸν ἀνασείων τ' ἐγὼ
> καὶ βακχιάζων ἐξ ἕδρας μεθώρμισα.

> 'When I was indoors shaking my head up and down and acting the Bacchant I shifted it [a curl] from its place.'

Throughout there is the sad contrast between Pentheus the young soldier/king of the earlier part of the play, and this poor creature turned to fussy pride in his hair, his gown, his Bacchic trappings. At the end of this section too Dionysos refers again to the way things have changed,

[78] See nn.28 and 48 above.

[79] See Seaford (n.10, *CQ* 1981, 259), on Dodds (n.14) ad 920-2: 'Dodds comments "Now at last — νῦν δέ in allusion to 502 — Pentheus' eyes are unsealed to 'see what he should see', because now the bull-nature, the Dionysiac nature, has broken loose in his own breast". But if so, never was a liberated bull-nature so abjectly tame. This kind of vague psychologizing does not get us very far.'

with Pentheus' mind having turned from rationality to madness: 'I am glad you have changed your mind', he comments (αἰνῶ δ' ὅτι μεθέστηκας φρενῶν, 944).

In the third section (944-70) the future is discussed. Pentheus has delusions of vast strength and energy: again his madness is stressed, and the change in his mind (947-8):

τὰς δὲ πρὶν φρένας
οὐκ εἶχες ὑγιεῖς, νῦν δ' ἔχεις οἵας σε δεῖ.

'The mind you had before was unsound; now you have it just as you should.'

Dionysos dissuades him from his mad thoughts of overturning the whole of Kithairon (945-52), and Pentheus replies (953), 'You are right', καλῶς ἔλεξας — an echo of the reversal in 818, 824, 826 and 838, where he suddenly sees his enemy, the Stranger, as wise.

They then speak of the coming expedition to the mountain. Pentheus' role of κατάσκοπος is linked with a threat of what I take to be death in Dionysos' sinister threefold repetition of κρυπτ-[80] (955-6):

κρύψῃ σὺ κρύψιν ἥν σε κρυφθῆναι χρεών,
ἐλθόντα δόλιον μαινάδων κατάσκοπον.

'You will be hidden in such a hiding as should hide you when you go as a crafty spy upon the maenads.'

In 959-60 Dionysos calls Pentheus a guardian, φύλαξ, reminding us of the pre-810 Pentheus whose major concern was to be a φύλαξ to his city, and linking this with another threat:

οὐκοῦν ἐπ' αὐτὸ τοῦτ' ἀποστέλλῃ φύλαξ·
λήψῃ δ' ἴσως σφᾶς, ἢν σὺ μὴ ληφθῇς πάρος.

'And so you go as a guardian against that very thing; perhaps you will catch them — if you are not caught first.'

They speak of the journey on to Kithairon, and the emphasis is on Pentheus now going alone, with μόνος three times repeated, and not as it seemed earlier he would be going, supported by Theban citizens (961-4):

Πε. κόμιζε διὰ μέσης με Θηβαίας χθονός·
μόνος γὰρ αὐτῶν εἰμ' ἀνὴρ τολμῶν τόδε.
Δι. μόνος σὺ πόλεως τῆσδ' ὑπερκάμνεις, μόνος·
τοιγάρ σ' ἀγῶνες ἀναμένουσιν οὓς ἐχρῆν.

Pe. Lead me through the midst of this land of the Thebans; alone of them I am the man who dares this.

Di. Alone you suffer for this city, alone. Therefore your destined ordeal is awaiting you.

Dodds notes that these words of Dionysos hint at Pentheus being the φαρμακός or scapegoat who carries away the sins and pollutions of the people and who is put to death after being ritually mocked (cf. 854-5) and pelted (cf. 1096-8) as the surrogate victim for the entire community.[81] But there is, I suggest, more than a hint here of Pentheus as the saviour of his city. Since this μόνος ... μόνος ... μόνος is in such strong contrast to the body of Theban men present in what we take to be the earlier legend and predicted in the Prologue here (50), then

alone - contrast with earlier legend

[80] I have not elsewhere seen 955 interpreted in this way, but I have always taken it that the concealment spoken of here hints at the concealment of the body in the earth after death.

[81] See Dodds ad loc.; also Jan Bremmer, 'Scapegoat Rituals in Ancient Greece', *HSCP* 87 (1983), 299-320. Segal (n.7) takes Pentheus as *pharmakos* for granted: see 49f, 136, 141f, 218, 225, 250, 289, 329. Burnett (n.32, 28-9) has suggested that Pentheus' death as *pharmakos* brings the city of Thebes back to the peace and unity that he himself wished for it, though her suggestions have on the whole met with scepticism: to give just two instances, see Segal (n.7), 44 n.42, and Hamilton (n.36), 142.

we should take Dionysos' statement at 963 at face value: Pentheus really will be dying to save his city, the one for the many,[82] since by his solitary death much suffering will be spared his citizens. Thus there is a kind of justification in the mad Pentheus' pride in his 'courageous' venture, which is increased by the hints of his being an epinician victor when he goes on to talk exultantly of being carried home in triumph for everyone to see (ἐπίσημον ὄντα πᾶσιν, 967; cf. ἀγῶνες, 964; ἀγῶνα μέγαν, 975; οὐρανῷ στηρίζον ... κλέος, 972; τὸν καλλίνικον κλεινόν, 1161; καλὸς ἀγών, 1163). So although Pentheus has become degraded at the hands of the god, Euripides has at the end restored to him a strange kind of nobility in the manner of his death, mad though Pentheus may be.[83]

This final scene between Pentheus and Dionysos ends with ἀντιλαβή, with an excited Pentheus constantly interrupting the god as he talks of what he thinks will be a triumphant return in his mother's arms (965-70):

Δι. ἔπου δέ· πομπὸς [δ'] εἶμ' ἐγὼ σωτήριος,
κεῖθεν δ' ἀπάξει σ' ἄλλος. Πε. ἡ τεκοῦσά γε.
Δι. ἐπίσημον ὄντα πᾶσιν. Πε. ἐπὶ τόδ' ἔρχομαι.
Δι. φερόμενος ἥξεις ... Πε. ἁβρότητ' ἐμὴν λέγεις.
Δι. ἐν χερσὶ μητρός. Πε. καὶ τρυφᾶν μ' ἀναγκάσεις.
Δι. τρυφάς γε τοιάσδε. Πε. ἀξίων μὲν ἅπτομαι.

Di. Follow me. I shall escort you safely there,
though another will bring you back. Pe. My mother.
Di. Remarkable in the eyes of all. Pe. It is for this that I go.
Di. You will come carried home .... Pe. You talk of pampering me.
Di. In your mother's arms. Pe. You will make me really spoiled.
Di. A certain kind of spoiling. Pe. I win what I deserve.

So the Fourth Episode also ends with a concentration on the death of Pentheus at his mother's hands, the last and worst of the horrors that are awaiting him. Always young, he has now become even younger and all but an infant again in his deluded pleasure at the thought of being carried in his mother's arms.[84] 'I win what I deserve', says the crazed Pentheus, and with these words he leaves the stage dressed in his woman's gown, his funerary robe; quite out of his mind he goes on his way to his mother and death.

With Pentheus gone, Dionysos sums up the events to come: Pentheus will find his fame (971-2, cf. 1073); Agaue with her sisters will be waiting to kill him (973-4); Dionysos will win his contest with the young man (974-6). Then the Chorus sing a song of vicious vengeance, calling down Λύσσα, who has already invaded Pentheus (851), to invade the daughters of Kadmos on the mountain (977-9). Here in a small lyric space (980-2) we have a recapitulation of all that is to happen in Euripides' version of the myth: Pentheus goes in woman's dress (ἐν γυναικομίμῳ στολᾷ, 980), maddened by Λύσσα (λυσσώδη, 981), as a passive scout instead of an active confrontor (κατάσκοπον μαινάδων, 981), to his mother (μάτηρ ..., 982); and the Chorus go on to sing a sinister vision of what may be happening at this very moment (982-90), reminding the audience of Agaue's part in the attack on the herdsmen (728-33) and thus giving ominous hints of Pentheus' approaching fate. They stress Agaue's tragic misconception: 'Who gave birth to him?', they have her ask (τίς ἄρα νιν ἔτεκεν; 987), then answer that he must be

[82] The *Christus Patiens*, which adapted the *Bakchai* to the story of Christ's Passion, uses 963 to describe Christ's redemption of mankind.

[83] See also n.123 below for Seaford's interpretation of the end of this scene as carrying a suggestion of hope.

[84] Thus I see extreme pathos in these lines, not the 'unhealthy closeness of mother and adult son' detected by Richard Seaford (n.40), 129 n.92. (Still less can I see this as the result of castration anxiety, as Sale (n.45), 72f. would have it.)

sprung from a lioness or from a Libyan Gorgon — with a certain ironic truth, since Agaue will think him to be a lion, and will herself cease to be human and become a monster.

The two refrains ring with bitter hatred against Pentheus, which, after the pathos of the previous scene, must cause strong revulsion in the audience. Finally the Chorus call to Dionysos to appear in one of his bestial shapes and with his 'deadly herd' (θανάσιμον ... ἀγέλαν, 1022) of maenads to hunt down Pentheus, who, when dead, will seem to be a young calf (νέος ὁ μόσχος, 1185) to his mother.

Thus, with the beginning of the Fifth Episode, we are prepared to hear of Pentheus' dreadful fate during his venture into the mountains, where he goes, though he does not know it, for his final, fatal confrontation with his mother. The Second Messenger describes it in one of Euripides' most powerful messenger speeches. When, finally, the maenads have uprooted the tree in which Pentheus had been seated by Dionysos, and he is hurled to the ground with screams of terror, Agaue, 'priestess of slaughter' (ἱερέα φόνου, 1114), falls on him (προσπίτνει, 1115, a verb very often used of an affectionate embrace[85]). Pentheus, once more restored to sanity, does his best to stop her (1115-21):

ὃ δὲ μίτραν κόμης ἄπο
ἔρριψεν, ὡς νιν γνωρίσασα μὴ κτάνοι
τλήμων Ἀγαύη, καὶ λέγει, παρηίδος
ψαύων· Ἐγώ τοι, μῆτερ, εἰμί, παῖς σέθεν
Πενθεύς, ὃν ἔτεκες ἐν δόμοις Ἐχίονος·
οἴκτιρε δ' ὦ μῆτέρ με, μηδὲ ταῖς ἐμαῖς
ἁμαρτίαισι παῖδα σὸν κατακτάνῃς.

'He tore the headband from his hair, so that wretched Agaue might recognise him and not kill him, and said, touching her cheek, "Mother, it is I, your son Pentheus, whom you bore in the house of Echion. Pity me, mother, do not, for my mistakes, kill your own son."'

Although Pentheus recognizes his errors of judgement (ἁμαρτίαισι, 1121), not once does he address Dionysos, but speaks only to his mother in words that emphasize their relationship: μῆτερ ... παῖς σέθεν ... ἔτεκες ... μῆτερ ... παῖδα σόν. Thus his concentration — and ours — is directed entirely towards Agaue and the horror that she is about to commit rather than towards the god. At this climactic moment in the play Dionysos' now proven divinity is made almost incidental, and the only thing that matters is that a mother is about to kill her own son. It seems too that Pentheus' own thoughts are quite as much for his mother's sufferings as for his own: there is a contrast of personal adjectives in ταῖς ἐμαῖς ... παῖδα σόν, on which Dodds notes: 'The antithesis is deliberate — the offence of an individual cannot justify the violation of the blood-tie.' Thus Pentheus' last thought before death is for his mother, to stop what she is doing for her sake;[86] and just as he has come to this destruction through his care for his city, so even in his death his concern reaches far beyond his own fate. Once more in his right mind, he triumphs over what the vengeful god had made of him in his madness.

Twice he calls Agaue 'mother', touching her cheek, but to no avail. As Gould says: 'There is a terrifying emptiness as the god vanishes and mother and son are left to come face to face, watched by the horrified messenger, and through his eyes by us: whatever else was

[85] Cf. 1164, again with stress on Agaue's murder of her own son.

[86] Winnington-Ingram (n.30, 131) comments on 1120-1: 'If with these words Pentheus regards Agaue and the awfulness for her of what she is doing, then he enjoys a moment of moral victory in defeat and the gross evil of the scene is mitigated by a gleam of humanity.'

hallucination in this play, this is not.'[87] Foaming at the mouth, and with rolling eyes, she tears his arm out from the shoulder. The other Bakchai follow on. Then, with Pentheus finally dead, Agaue fixes his dismembered head to the top of her thyrsus and carries it home in triumph, thinking it to be that of a lion killed in the hunt. The Messenger sums up the grief of her triumph (1144-7):

> χωρεῖ δὲ θήρα δυσπότμῳ γαυρουμένη
> τειχέων ἔσω τῶνδ', ἀνακαλοῦσα Βάκχιον
> τὸν ξυγκύναγον, τὸν ξυνεργάτην ἄγρας,
> τὸν καλλίνικον, ᾧ δάκρυα νικηφορεῖ.

'Exulting in her ill-fated prey she comes inside these walls, calling on Bakchos as fellow hunter, her partner in the kill, the triumph-giver — in whose service she wins a victory of tears.'

In the final choral ode (1153-64), a song of triumph in revenge, Euripides again gives a lyric summary of his dramatic version of Pentheus' death, mentioning all those points which seem to have been his own innovations to the legend: Pentheus took woman's clothing and the thyrsos-wand, which meant certain death (1156-8); and a bull — a reminder here of his delusions — led him to disaster (1159); the Theban women have made a fine καλλίνικος, but it will lead to grief, to tears (1160-2); this is indeed a καλὸς ἀγών (we are reminded of Pentheus going εἰς ἀγῶνα μέγαν, 975), to clothe a dripping hand with the blood of one's child (1163-4: the reading of these two lines is uncertain, but it is clear that they refer to the death of a child by a mother). This is the cue for Agaue to enter, and enter she does, with Pentheus' head fixed to the top of her thyrsos[88] and boasting joyfully that she has been his foremost slayer (1179-80, 1183). But before we move on to discuss this final scene, we should consider what we know of Agaue herself.

Like Pentheus she is drawn in very human terms. In the Prologue we hear of her reason for doubting that Semele was mother to a god, which turns out to be a quite different reason from that of divine intervention given by Aischylos: in the *Xantriai* Hera enters Thebes disguised as a begging priestess with the express aim of stirring up opposition against Semele and her son.[89] But in Euripides, as Dionysos tells us in the Prologue, Agaue and her sisters say that Semele became pregnant by a man, and tried to fob it off on Zeus — a very natural, rational reaction, one feels (26-31):

> ... μ' ἀδελφαὶ μητρός, ἃς ἥκιστα χρῆν,
> Διόνυσον οὐκ ἔφασκον ἐκφῦναι Διός,
> Σεμέλην δὲ νυμφευθεῖσαν ἐκ θνητοῦ τινος
> ἐς Ζῆν' ἀναφέρειν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν λέχους,
> Κάδμου σοφίσμαθ', ὧν νιν οὕνεκα κτανεῖν
> Ζῆν' ἐξεκαυχῶνθ', ὅτι γάμους ἐψεύσατο.

'My mother's sisters, who least of all should have done so, said that I, Dionysos, was not the son of Zeus, but that Semele had been seduced by some mortal and then — a subtle wile of Kadmos, this — ascribed to Zeus her loss of virginity; and they loudly claimed that this was why Zeus had killed her, because she lied about her marriage.'

[87] J. P. Gould, 'Mother's Day. A Note on Euripides' *Bacchae*', *Papers given at a Colloquium on Greek Drama in Honour of R. P. Winnington-Ingram*, Supplementary Paper No. 15 of the Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies (1987), 32-9, here 37.

[88] ἔλικα νεότομον, 1170, makes this clear. Later, and certainly at 1185-7 when she strokes it, she holds the head in her hands.

[89] See Dodds (n.14), xxx.

Theirs is a commonsense interpretation of the facts: Semele said that Zeus had fathered her child, and then was struck by lightning — which must have seemed to prove that she had lied sacrilegiously. It is for this reason that Agaue and her sisters, together with the rest of the women of Thebes, have been driven mad by Dionysos on to the mountains (32-3):

> τοιγάρ νιν αὐτὰς ἐκ δόμων ὤστρησ' ἐγὼ
> μανίαις, ὄρος δ' οἰκοῦσι παράκοποι φρενῶν.
>
> 'Therefore I have goaded those same sisters mad from their homes, and they are living on the mountain, their wits gone.'

Throughout the play we are aware of the women mad on the mountain, living sometimes at peace, sometimes in fury and violence, but always divorced from the real world of rational reaction which brought them to their madness. In the final scene Agaue's madness will be cured by her father, Kadmos, and she will be completely restored to sanity, to this real world, to recognize to the full what she has done. Thus a child, made mad by the god, will be brought back to reality by a parent. The same is true of Pentheus. Maddened by the god, he returns to his right mind when besieged in his tree by Agaue and her maenads. Dodds has it that this return to sanity occurs when he discards his μίτρα (1115) so that his mother might recognize him, but it must occur earlier than this. Certainly when he falls screaming (μυρίοις οἰμώγμασιν, 1112) from his tree at his mother's feet he knows exactly what is to happen to him (κακοῦ γὰρ ἐγγὺς ὢν ἐμάνθανεν, 1113), and I would suggest that he knows even earlier at 1101-2:

> κρεῖσσον γὰρ ὕψος τῆς προθυμίας ἔχων
> καθῆσθ' ὁ τλήμων, ἀπορίᾳ λελημμένος.
>
> 'He was too high even for their ardour as he sat there in misery, overtaken by helplessness.'[90]

Both ὁ τλήμων and ἀπορίᾳ suggest his awareness of the true situation. Perhaps realization comes to him when the maenads, led by his mother (μήτηρ Ἀγαύη, 1092), begin their attack.

Thus there are similarities in the madnesses of Pentheus and Agaue, but also a difference: Pentheus, brought back to his right mind, dies of his former madness. But Agaue, restored to reality, has to live with the grievous results of her madness forever. Once again we are brought to the verge of the final scene of the play, and once again I should like to pause before launching into a discussion of it, this time to ask: assuming that Euripides did indeed make to the legend the innovations of Pentheus' madness, and woman's dress, and death at his mother's hands, what effect do these innovations have on a general interpretation of this play, as opposed to the more detailed effects that we have so far considered?

* * * * *

Much of the work done in the past on interpretation of the *Bakchai* has concentrated on the god, and asked: what is Euripides saying about Dionysos and his worship? Is it praise or is it condemnation?[91] And indeed this focus is understandable, since the god is in control of the action from the moment that he steps on stage, right up until the final scene when Agaue and Kadmos choose their own responses to the tragedy that he has brought about.[92] But I suggest that this is not where Euripides' own concentration lay. Assuming that he did change the entire

[90] Kirk's translation: G. S. Kirk, *The* Bacchae *of Euripides* (Cambridge, 1979).

[91] See Segal (n.7), 20 n.22, for references to works which deal with Euripides' attitude to Dionysos.

[92] On this point, see further below, pp.64f.

manner of Pentheus' death, and that he did for the first time have Agaue kill her own son, then it seems likely that in fact his concentration was not so much on the god, but rather on his human figures — on Pentheus, and the fall of the house of Kadmos, and perhaps most of all on Agaue, the god's instrument of vengeance and also his victim.

Let us take the figure of Pentheus first. Instead of going to Kithairon with his men and dying sane, in martial action against the maenads, Pentheus goes alone, in woman's dress,[93] and mad. The fact that this comes about against all reason, despite all his endeavours to solve his city's problems in the light of rationality, makes this true tragedy. He persisted[94] in his stand against the — to him — evil Stranger with all his human capacity, but to no avail. He said himself that he had no way against the Stranger (ἀπόρῳ γε τῷδε συμπεπλέγμεθα ξένῳ, 800), and indeed in the Stranger's divinity he had not. But equally Dionysos and his miracles found no way against the sane Pentheus with his rational judgements in the face of things incredible, and so to overcome him the god had to make him mad, adding to madness degradation.[95] Of all the scenes in Greek Tragedy, therefore, those between Pentheus and Dionysos after the god has taken possession of the young king must surely be two of those most productive of pity and fear.[96]

Furthermore, for Pentheus to die alone, thus sparing the body of Theban men who seemed under threat by Dionysos in the Prologue (50-2), adds a kind of nobility to the degradation of his death, and Dionysos is right to tell him that he is dying on behalf of his city (963).[97] This nobility is increased by the fact that even here, on the very point of death itself, his thoughts are quite as much for his mother as for his own terrible fate.[98]

To move to Pentheus' death at Agaue's hands: if Euripides did indeed innovate her killing of Pentheus, what effect does this have on the play? Most obviously, perhaps: to be killed by his own mother increases the already increased pathos of Pentheus' death.[99] But it has an even greater effect on our response to Agaue since, terrible as the death of Pentheus is, it is even more terrible to kill one's own son in madness, then to learn of it and to live with that knowledge. It is interesting that Pentheus has no *kommos*, no lyric song with the Chorus, which all major characters normally have (and which Agaue, of course, does have). Perhaps this is because the Chorus are hostile to him, so such a *kommos* did not seem dramatically feasible to Euripides. But it may also be because the greater concentration was always meant to be on Agaue, despite the fact that we are aware of her only 'in the wings', as it were, for the greater part of the play;[100] that she was always the principal object of Dionysos' revenge,[101] and

[93] The fact that this new woman's dress is also to be Pentheus' funerary dress makes the innovation even more dramatically powerful (see Seaford (n.10, 'The Last Bath of Agamemnon'), 249-50, 252).

[94] On Pentheus' persistence, see Rosenmeyer (n.33), 385: 'Against the chorus, which espouses the cause of formlessness and instability, Pentheus is the champion of permanence and stability. Neither his anger nor his defeat are valid arguments against the merit of this championship.' Euripides' methods here remind Kitto (n.59) of those of Sophokles: 'Each successive event that ought to make [Pentheus] pause serves only to drive him to still more uncompromizing opposition' (377). Burnett (n.32) calls Pentheus 'perhaps the strongest and freest of all the heroes of tragedy' (29).

[95] As Diller says (n.54, 366): 'The *Bacchae* is the tragedy of the power which forces a man to divest himself of his identity and most brutally compels those who try most forcefully to hold on to themselves.'

[96] Arist. *Poet.* 1449 b.

[97] See pp.55f above.

[98] See p.57 above.

[99] Is this perhaps why Euripides made Pentheus so very young? Because he had innovated the son's murder by the mother, and wished to add to the pity of it with Pentheus' extreme youth?

[100] And the play is called the *Bakchai* — of one group of whom Agaue is the leader.

[101] Winnington-Ingram seems to move somewhat in the direction of this conclusion (n.30, 153): '[The Bakchai] serve Dionysos ... as a "punishment" ... if indeed it is correct to state that they were made Bacchanals as a

that Pentheus' derangement and death are the means to the end of her tragic punishment.[102] Certainly the death of Pentheus is by no means the 'climax' of the play.[103] When we hear of it we have still to move from horror to worse horror: to see Agaue come on stage, boasting of her triumph over the dead child whose head she carries in her arms; to see her brought back to reality by Kadmos and learn what she has done. The whole dramatic movement of the second part of the play has been leading up to this recognition of a dead son by a mother. Thus we should expect this final scene — and especially the part played by Agaue — to have key significance for an interpretation of the play.

So let us now at last consider this final scene of the play.[104] A mother[105] has killed her son, and she comes onstage in triumph, with his head in her arms, believing it to be that of a lion which she has killed in the hunt, and boasting of her prowess.[106] This, we see, is what Dionysos can do to mortals who deny him. Agaue had rationalised Semele's pregnancy. Pentheus had tried to cling to rational solutions when bemused by Dionysos and his miracles. But the rational world of Agaue and Pentheus was not enough. For both of them Kithairon was waiting, Kithairon which becomes in the play the symbol for the kingdom of Dionysos.[107] Here on Kithairon the maenads worship their god; here, though they do not know it, they wait for Pentheus. As Segal says, 'One does not return from that mountain quite the same person as one was in setting out.'[108] Moreover Kithairon and Thebes represent the two polarities of φύσις and νόμος, familiar from the debates of the sophists. Thebes, the city, and Pentheus, its protector, stand for νόμος, the civilised life based on reason, with law and order, and personal responsibilities; Kithairon, the wild, stands for φύσις, the free life of nature based on instinct and emotion, with no personal ties or duties. The women have been forced to leave Thebes — their homes, their looms, their babies — to go as maenads into the wild (ἦ τὰς παρ' ἱστοῖς ἐκλιποῦσα κερκίδας / ἐς μείζον' ἥκω, θῆρας ἀγρεύειν χεροῖν (1236-7), boasts Agaue: 'I have left weaving at the loom and have risen to higher things, to hunting wild beasts with my bare hands'). To them in their madness the responsibility of mother to child counts for nothing, and having deserted their human babies they suckle wild animals. They scratch springs of milk

"punishment". 114-19 regards them as the first-fruits of Theban participation in the cult. Their punishment may reside rather in the fact that they were the instruments of the punishment of Pentheus.' See also Segal (n.7, 316-7): 'However much we may pity Pentheus, the tragic element at the end belongs to those who become bacchants ... '. It was certainly Agaue who told her son in the first place of Dionysos' non-divinity: see 244-5, cf. 30-1.

[102] Just as Phaidra dominates the first part of the *Hipp.* with her plight, while remaining the means to Hippolytos' punishment; just as Antigone dominates the audience's sympathies in *Ant.* until her death and then slips to the background, having served her turn as the means to Kreon's tragic downfall; just as Deianeira, intensely sympathetic though she may be, is the means to bring Herakles' to his new and noble death (see my chapter 'Deianeira and Herakles' in *The Creative Poet* (n.12), 47-77).

We should no doubt have a clearer awareness of the importance of Agaue if the last scene of the *Bakchai* were not so badly mutilated.

[103] In contrast, most likely, to other plays on the same theme — see Webster (n.15), 275: 'Earlier Dionysiac plays, I suspect, ended with the destruction of the Resister.'

[104] And even if Pentheus' death at his mother's hands is not after all the innovation that we are supposing, Euripides' treatment of it is all his own and the following comments still stand.

[105] On the emphasis on mothers in the play, see Gould (n.87), passim. He notes also that the day of the first performance of the *Bakchai* was also the day of the first performance of the *Iphigeneia at Aulis*, where again there is dramatic importance laid on the mother's relationship with her child.

[106] What, I wonder, did Euripides intend for Agaue's mask? One showing her earlier triumph, thus adding poignancy to her later grief? Or one showing her later suffering, to add tragic emphasis to her early delusions of victory? These are just two possibilities.

[107] Lines 62, 797, 1142, 1177-8, 1219, 1292, 1384-5, 726-7, 1084-5, and ὄρος throughout.

[108] Segal (n.7), 304. To digress: these words always put me in mind of Lob's wood in J. M. Barrie's *Dear Brutus*.

from the ground and later kill the milk-giving cows made tame and useful for civilisation.[109] All this is by the power of Dionysos. Pentheus had tried to oppose that power; had tried to assert νόμος in the face of this φύσις; had failed, and was killed. Human rationality in the face of cosmic, irrational powers; human desire for order; the power of λόγος; all, it seems, are futile.[110] And this dramatised defeat of νόμος by φύσις culminates and is embodied in the killing of a son by a mother who, in the ecstasy of her god-inspired madness, fails to recognize her own kin to whom she is bound. This, I think, is why Euripides gave Pentheus this new way of death.

And so in the final scene the mad Agaue comes onstage with her son's head in her arms. φύσις, the untrammelled life in the wild, has been proved the supreme power — or so it would seem. But no: φύσις may have taken over temporarily. A mother, lost to all reason and exulting in her power and freedom, may have killed her son in mistaken ecstasy. But in this final scene there is once more an assertion of human values, personal affections, personal responsibilities,[111] and all centred on the figure of Agaue herself. Thus, although it is usual to see the ending of the play as one of unrelieved desolation, I find that I cannot read it in this way. Dyer[112] speaks compellingly of the two worlds of the *Bakchai*: the supernatural world, where there are 'gods who are bulls and women who leap and run with superhuman strength', and the real world, 'from which Pentheus blustered in the First Episode ... It is our own world ... It is the nice comfortable world we left for the sake of the story', and to which we return with Agaue after the kill. 'Yet here is Agaue, a mother, something we all know and love, and her world is altered beyond recall, broken. She has in her hands the head of her son, whom she has just murdered ... The supernatural world ... has altered the real world beyond recognition. A mother has murdered her son'. Indeed this is true. But I would add that in this final scene we are once again fully in this 'real' world. The god is once more distant, detached; the miracles are over; and this real world with its human affections and responsibilities — changed though it may be — is the one which survives. In this final scene Kadmos gently, and with a quite amazing forbearance, brings Agaue back to sanity, to recognize whose head she holds in her arms — perhaps the most moving ἀναγνώρισις in Greek Tragedy. He comes slowly with his questions to the point where he can ask, 'Whose head then are you holding in your arms?' (... ἐν ἀγκάλαις ἔχεις, 1277, as one would hold a little child; cf. 699f). Agaue is afraid to look: 'A lion's; at least so the hunting women said', she replies (λέοντος, ὥς γ'[113] ἐφασκον αἱ θηρώμεναι, 1278). 'Now look properly', says Kadmos; 'Looking is but a brief effort' (βραχὺς ὁ μόχθος εἰσιδεῖν, 1279; full of an immense pity, for he knows that the pain of seeing will go on and on). 'I see the greatest anguish', she cries (ὁρῶ μέγιστον ἄλγος, 1282). But she is wrong: there is worse to come. 'Who killed him?', she asks, and for a moment Kadmos cannot reply so that Agaue fears to hear the answer (1287-8), just as in the *Oidipous Tyrannos* the Herdsman hesitates to make the final revelation, and Oidipous summons his strength to hear it

[109] See Segal (n.7), 66.

[110] See Segal (n.7): '[Euripides] is uncompromising in his exposure of the discrepancy between man's need for an orderly world and the disorder, both within and without, of which the gods are both the controllers and the symbolic projections.'

[111] And, as Segal points out (n.7, 344-7): 'The poet ... by the very act of intellectual creation, asserts an implicit victory of culture over nature and of order over chaos.' The tragedy, by the poet's channelling of Dionysiac energies into its creation, 'is the mark of both accepting and rejecting the god, of both defeat by Dionysos and triumph over Dionysos'.

[112] R. R. Dyer, 'Image and Symbol: The Link between the Two Worlds of the *Bacchae*', *AUMLA* 21 (1964), 15-26, here 21.

[113] Buxton calls this 'the most overwhelming use of this particle in tragedy' (R. G. A. Buxton, *Sophocles*, *Greece and Rome New Surveys in the Classics* No. 16 (Oxford, 1984), 9 n.8).

(1169-70). Then Agaue hears, '*You* killed him' (σύ νιν κατέκτας, 1289), and this at last is truly the μέγιστον ἄλγος.

But she shoulders this knowledge, and somehow achieves a real victory, a genuine triumph in contrast to her earlier mad imaginings, because she now accepts fully her own responsibility in what she has done. 'What part did my folly have in Pentheus' fate?' she asks (Πενθεῖ δὲ τί μέρος ἀφροσύνης προσῆκ' ἐμῆς; 1301), and she uses the term ἀφροσύνη — not μανία, which could be sent by a god (cf. Kadmos' words at 1295), but ἀφροσύνη, with all its implications of her own responsibility. Sadly her speech over the corpse of Pentheus has been lost. But we know that she grieves over his fate, blaming herself for his death, while she recomposes his broken body.[114] This would have reinforced even more her grief and self-reproach for her child-murder, and would have been a kind of reintegration, a reassertion of the essential human values in the face of suffering and death. Pat Easterling has suggested that, although the reassembling of the fragmented body might seem to our taste grisly sensationalism, yet it would have seemed perfectly serious and proper to the original audience.[115] This, I think, is quite correct. It provides a move back to ritual order, a reassertion of νόμος and the institutions of human society. In the face of this scene, and the valiant endeavours of the human beings in coping with such deep disaster, the revenge of the god is diminished to pettiness and his 'victory' almost negated.

Is it possible, I wonder, to go one step further and see in this reconstitution of the body of Pentheus an even more positive reintegration after the dissolutions which the play has offered? It has long been accepted that Pentheus' death in the *Bakchai* has affinities with the sequence of πομπή (cf. 965, 1047), ἀγών (cf. 964, 975, 1163) and κῶμος (cf. 1167, 1172) which were part of Greek sacrificial ritual.[116] As victim of the god, Pentheus is dressed in his livery and consecrated, as he himself admits (ἀνακείμεσθα, 934); he is pelted (1096-1100) by the maenads (cf. μαινάδας θυοσκόους, 224); there is a moment of ritual silence before his death (1084-5); and his mother falls on him like a 'priestess of slaughter' (ἱερέα φόνου, 1114). Thus Pentheus' death clearly becomes a kind of sacrifice, and Pentheus himself as the sacrificial victim becomes in some sense identified with the god. Moreover Euripides, throughout the play, has suggested that Pentheus and Dionysos share some kind of identification. Both are very young; both are born of a child of Kadmos (44, 181); both have just arrived in the city of Thebes and announce their arrival with a speech which shows us their own viewpoint on the current situation; both become both hunter and hunted during the course of the play;[117] Pentheus, when mad, sees Dionysos in one of his bestial manifestations as a bull (920-2, cf. 100f, 618), and Pentheus himself is seen by Agaue as a bull-calf (νέος ὁ μόσχος, 1185); Dionysos can also become a lion or a snake (1017-9), while Pentheus' birth from Echion, one of the Σπαρτοί sprung from the dragon's teeth, is stressed,[118] and he is seen by Agaue perhaps

[114] For its known contents, see Dodds (n.14), 234-5. *Contra* Dodds (232, 234-5), I would agree with Kirk (n.90, 130-1) that the *compositio membrorum* would more likely have occurred in the lacuna after 1300 rather than after 1329. Kadmos' *enkomion* (1308-22) is more suitable over Pentheus' recomposed body, and moreover Agaue's laments would fit most appropriately directly after the rising anguish of the recognition scene.

[115] See Easterling (n.74), passim.

[116] For the fullest discussion, see Foley (n.7), 208ff.

[117] Cf. 228, 434-6, 459, 848, 890, 977, 986, 1020, 1144, 1146, 1171, 1183, 1189, 1192, 1196, 1201, 1203-4, 1241.

[118] Lines 212-13, 265, 507, 538ff, 995f, 1025f, 1030, 1118-19, 1155, 1274-6. As Dodds notes on 537-41: 'References to P.'s curious ancestry are strikingly frequent in the play.' The Chorus tend to stress Pentheus' birth, suggesting that his chthonic ancestry makes him into some kind of savage monster. But their comments should not be taken at face value, since these are clearly projections of their own fear and anger. See also Segal (n.7), 136, and Winnington-Ingram (n.30), 80.

as a lion in 1174, and as a climbing beast (τὸν ἀμβάτην θῆρ', 1107-8).[119] There are also verbal reciprocities which underline this shared identity: ἀναφαίνω, 528 (Dionysos), cf. ἀναφαίνει, 538 (Pentheus); ἄνω κάτω, 349 (Pentheus), cf. 601-3 (Dionysos); ὅτι γάμους ἐψεύσατο, 31 (Dionysos) = 245 (Pentheus); ἐσφέρει, 353 (Dionysos), cf. εἰσοίσει, 367 (Pentheus); πικρὰν βάκχευσιν ἐν Θήβαις ἰδών, 357 (Pentheus of Dionysos), cf. πικροτάτους ἰδόντι δεσμοὺς τοὺς ἐμούς, 634 (Dionysos of Pentheus).[120]

Now if, before Euripides, Pentheus died in open combat with the maenads, and the Euripidean Pentheus — invaded by the god and dressed in the livery of the god — is new, then Pentheus dying as a sacrifice to the god must also be new, as, therefore, must this identification of Pentheus with Dionysos. So what follows this new kind of death must, given this context, have great significance, especially since here also there is a further particular link between the dead king and the god: Pentheus' body, gathered up by his grandfather, is recomposed by Agaue — almost certainly for the first time in Euripides' play[121] — just as in the myth of the death and rebirth of Dionysos[122] the body of Dionysos himself was recomposed by his mother also so that he might be brought back to life. Pentheus, of course, remains dead and grieved over. Nevertheless I am inclined to think that Euripides meant this scene to hold in it more of comfort, even of healing, than we, almost two and a half thousand years on, are capable of seeing.[123]

Be that as it may, the survivors, Agaue and Kadmos, hopeless though their future is, offer by their response to catastrophe a further feeling of affirmation in the face of tragedy. After Dionysos has appeared in all his divinity to give his dispensations for the future, there is a scene of mutual consolation and pity between father and daughter, and the play ends with their anguished farewell before they go off into separate exile, each in their mutual embrace both giving and seeking comfort (1363ff), which gives an assertion of human tenderness and love in vivid contrast to the attitude of the pitiless god who has been so excessive in his vengeful brutality (1346, 1374-6).[124] As in the *Hippolytos*,[125] the stage is left to the human sufferers,[126] and the god, having done his worst, no longer seems important. 'Why do you throw your arms around me, unhappy child, as the young swan shelters the old, grown white and helpless?', asks Kadmos (τί μ' ἀμφιβάλλεις χερσίν, ὦ τάλαινα παῖ, / ὄρνις ὅπως κηφῆνα πολιόχρων κύκνος; 1364-5), giving a haunting image of a single bird in its weakness and grief, in contrast to the

[119] Michael Parsons puts forward several of these points in his article (n.45), but the identification of Pentheus and Dionysos which they suggest leads him to a quite different type of conclusion based in psychoanalytical theory.

[120] See further Segal (n.7), 29: 'Pentheus becomes not only a crypto-maenad, but also a crypto-Dionysus. An androgynous figure at the center of a band of Dionysiac women, he is duped by the god but simultaneously represents the god; he impersonates a maenad but also impersonates Dionysus.'

[121] See above, n.75.

[122] See Seaford (n.10, *CQ* 1981), 267 and n.140, also Segal (n.7), 48f.

[123] Seaford (n.10, *CQ* 1981, 267) comments: 'There is a pathetic hint of joyful rebirth, not only in the mother's recomposition of the body, but in the passage in which Dionysos predicts Pentheus' triumphal return (963-70).' If only we had Dionysos' speech in this final scene entire, and knew what he had to say about Pentheus' death and about his own Mysteries, we should have a firmer basis for interpreting this last scene of the play.

[124] Dionysos' revenge may have been 'just', but on this 'justice' see Dodds (*The Ancient Concept of Progress* (Oxford, 1973), 89): 'It is the justice of Kypris, the justice of Dionysos, an unpitying, unreasoning justice that pauses for no nice assessment of deserts, but sweeps away the innocent with the guilty, Phaedra with Hippolytus, Cadmus with Pentheus.'

[125] Another echo of the *Hipp.* is Kadmos' reproachful comment on the god's attitude in 1348, similar to that of the Servant in *Hipp.*, who in effect gives a critical comment on Aphrodite's Prologue speech (120). I intend to pursue this whole topic elsewhere.

[126] See Dodds on 1377-8, which should be given to Kadmos with ἔπασχεν instead of ἔπασχον; the god's last utterance is at 1351. See also Winnington-Ingram (n.30), 147.

collective ecstasy of the flocks of birds in 748 and 1090-1. Agaue's last words are a rejection of Kithairon and all it stood for, the beauty and the horror, which voices the similar rejection that Euripides must have meant his audience to be feeling, and which finally reasserts human values (1383-7):

> ἔλθοιμι δ' ὅπου
> μήτε Κιθαιρὼν <ἔμ' ἴδοι> μιαρὸς
> μήτε Κιθαιρῶν' ὄσσοισιν ἐγώ,
> μήθ' ὅθι θύρσου μνῆμ' ἀνάκειται·
> Βάκχαις δ' ἄλλαισι μέλοιεν.

'May I come where neither unclean Kithairon may see me, nor I see Kithairon, and where there is no dedicated thyrsos to remind. Let other Bakchai care about them.'

So although a mother, blinded and maddened by the god, has turned on her own son and ripped him to pieces; although the rational world of Pentheus and Agaue was not enough to allow them to escape catastrophe; nevertheless that 'real' world with its human ties and affections and responsibilities, changed though it may be forever, does in the end survive, and even — despite the desolation and hopelessness of the future — win a kind of triumph.

*University College London*

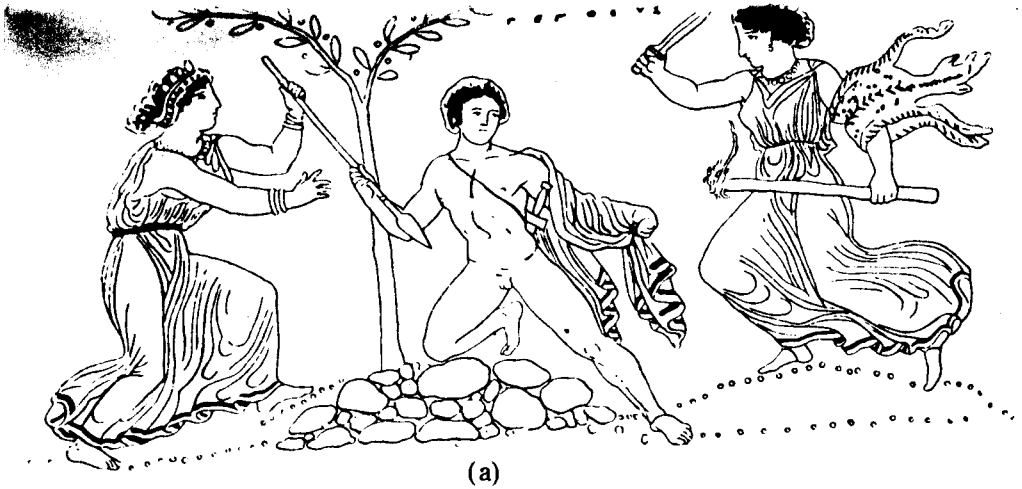
(a)

(b)

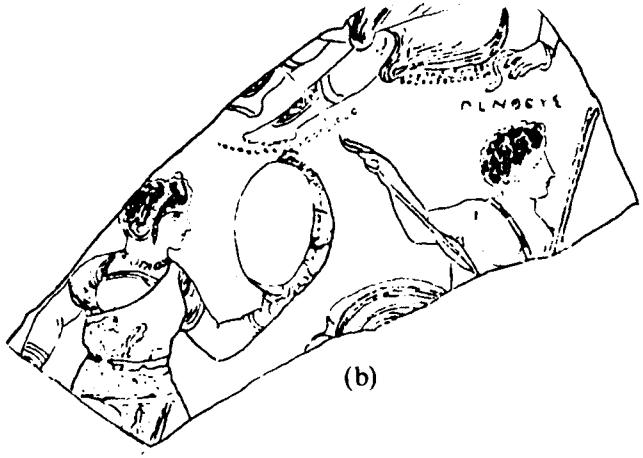
(d)

(c)

PLATE 1



(a)



(b)

(c)

PLATE 2

# PLATE 3



(a)



(b)

PLATE 4